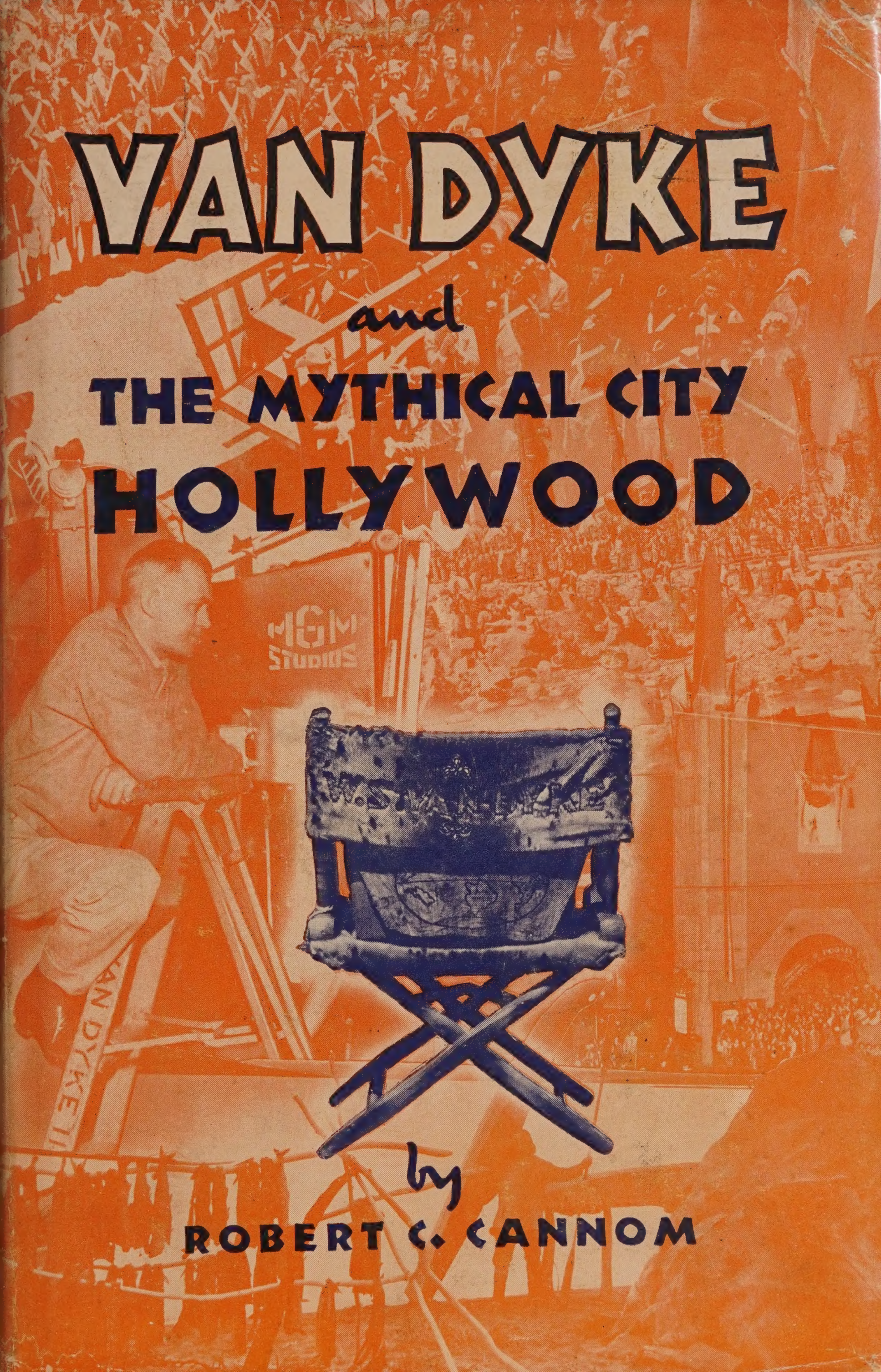
VAN DYKE

and

THE MYTHICAL CITY HOLLYWOOD


MGM STUDIOS
W. S. VAN DYKE
VAN DYKE II

by

ROBERT C. CANNOM

$3.50

VAN DYKE
and
The Mythical City
HOLLYWOOD

by
Robert C. Cannom
FOREWORD
by
Adela Rogers St. Johns

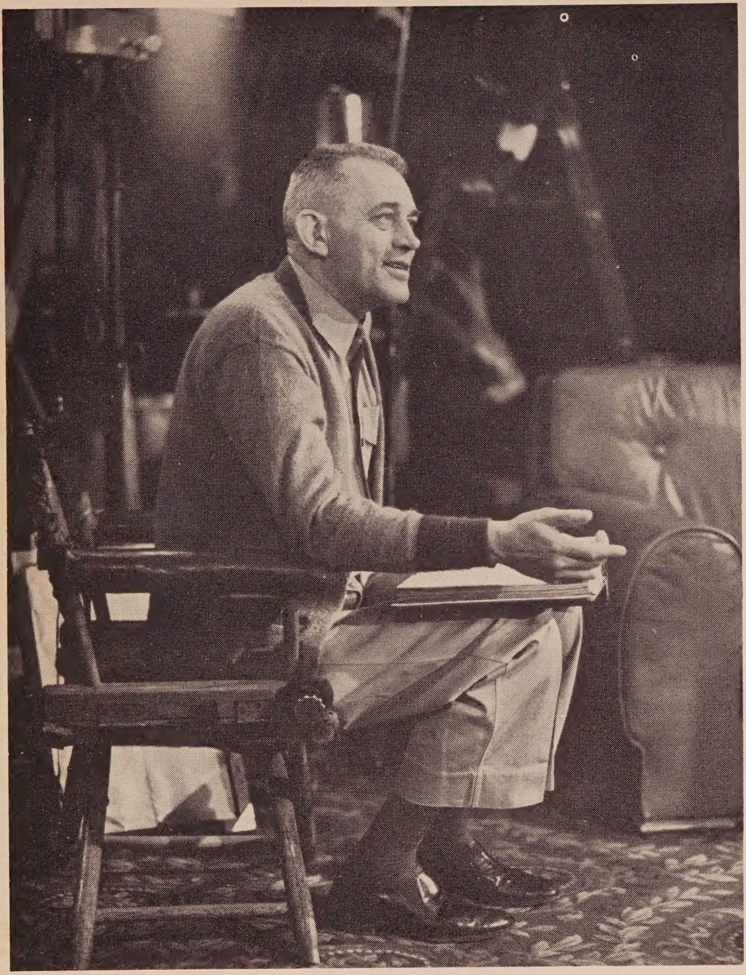
Dealing with the colorful career of the famous motion picture directorial genius, the late W. S. Van Dyke II, VAN DYKE AND THE MYTHICAL CITY, HOLLYWOOD is not a biography, but an engrossing narrative revealing "behind scenes" passages in Van Dyke's life.

Across the pages parades a steady march of heretofore untold anecdotes involving such familiar names as those of Jack Dempsey, Ruth Roland, Buck Jones, Col. Tim McCoy, Trader Horn, Norma Shearer, Nelson Eddy, Jeanette MacDonald, William Powell, Myrna Loy, Greta Garbo, Tyrone Power, Joan Crawford, Clark Gable, Ingrid Bergman, Robert Montgomery, Rosalind Russell — and a veritable Who's Who in Hollywood.

From the time he gave up the stage to accept the role of a Babylonian King in D. W. Griffith's first screen spectacle, "Intolerance," in 1915, Van Dyke lived and breathed motion pictures. He was among the first to successfully produce adventure pictures with authentic backgrounds — such historic epics as "Trader Horn," "Eskimo" and "White Shadows of the South Seas." Indeed, many of Van Dyke's adventures in filming these pictures were as thrilling as the screen stories.

MURRAY & GEE, INC.
CULVER CITY, CALIFORNIA

op 15 w/ee



Woodbridge Strong Van Dyke II

(Photo from Seymour Stern's BIOGRAPHY OF D. W. GRIFFITH)
W. S. Van Dyke's initiation into motion picture action came unexpectedly as a chariot driver in this wild and dangerous sequence in INTOLERANCE.

Stunt man Bob Rose kicks the throttle wide open and Ruth Roland's car leaps across the track, the engine actually grazing the machine.

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2025 with funding from
anonymous donation in memory of Carolyn Hauer

https://archive.org/details/mythical-city-hollywood

VAN DYKE
and
THE MYTHICAL CITY
HOLLYWOOD

Copyright 1948
By Laura Winston Van Dyke

Printed in the United States of America by
MURRAY & GEE, Inc., *Publishers,* Culver City, California

To Laura Winston Van Dyke, in memory of her son, W. S. Van Dyke II; to his family, and many friends . . . . .

"The Great Man Is He Who Does
Not Lose His Child's Heart."

MENG-TSE. 372-289 B.C.

Foreword

There are very few of us, either those of us who were here, or those who have only heard of it, who wouldn't like to visit the Hollywood of the good old days. The pioneer days when the art and industry of the motion picture was growing from infancy to greatness, the days when all the fabulous gold-rush was one and drama was rife.

In "Van Dyke and the Mythical City, Hollywood," Robert Cannom takes you there — into that gold-rush, pioneer, struggling, gay and incredible city, and to meet one of its great and most colorful figures, "Woody" Van Dyke.

The tale can't be equaled for excitement and for story and character — these are the people who made Hollywood, these are the young and lusty giants who made the motion picture and whether they were greater than the stars of today I do not know, but they certainly had a quality all their own.

Mr. Cannom has told this story well, and he has made our beloved Woody Van Dyke, director de luxe, Marine war hero, inventor and experimenter, a real living figure as he roars and fights his way to the very top. When you have finished this book you have made that visit into a star-filled and thrilling past.

— ADELA ROGERS ST. JOHNS

VAN DYKE

and

THE MYTHICAL CITY, HOLLYWOOD

Index

Chapter Page
1 The Mythical City 17
2 Little Lord Fauntleroy Van Dyke 29
3 Mother and Son 35
4 The Laura Winston Players 43
5 A Babylonian King 51
6 First Assignment 63
7 His Last Thirty-Five Cents 77
8 Jack Dempsey's "Daredevil Jack" 83
9 Success Meets Failure 93
10 The Oklahoma Outlaws 101
11 Ruth Roland Out-Perils "Pauline" 109
12 Disgusted With Hollywood 119
13 Buck Jones 125
14 A Panic At Universal 133
15 First Job at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer 137
16 Colonel Tim McCoy and Indians 145
17 "White Shadows in the South Seas" 159
18 The Inner Circle 175
19 A Celebrity Over Night 181
20 Horning Into Africa 187
21 Debunking An "Exclusive" 225
22 The Nose, The Voice, The Haircut 231
23 Fifty Below Zero 241
24 Trophy Room 271
25 Myrna Loy 277

Index

Chapter Page
26 Philo Vance Becomes Nick Charles 285
27 "Walter Winchell" For a Day 295
28 Uncle Eddie 305
29 Nelson Eddy, Jeanette MacDonald, and Van Dyke 315
30 Washington vs. Hollywood 333
31 "Naughty Marietta" to "Rose Marie" 341
32 A Director's Right Hand 351
33 The Saturday Night Guys 357
34 Common Sense Movie Making 369
35 Norma Shearer and "Marie Antoinette" 379
36 The Motion Picture Business and War 393
37 The 22nd Battalion United States Marine Corps 401
38 Wouldn't Accept "No" 409
39 Hollywood Loses a Legend 415

Appendix—Screen Credits of W. S. Van Dyke II
at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Chapter 1

THE MYTHICAL CITY

CHAPTER ONE

The Mythical City

Hollywood has probably been the most exploited and promoted village of its size anywhere, and yet as Christmas is but a state of mind, so Hollywood, rather than a place, is but a name — a mythical city signifying quite a number of things, many of which are legends.

In this community of legends, Woody Van Dyke stands out as a legend of legends, and where the man left off and the legend began is fully as hard to determine as the boundaries of Hollywood itself. Not that he had more than the usual number of idiosyncrasies — sometimes used to advantage in Hollywood — but because of a simple, honest approach to the business he was engaged in, and making movies is a business — a costly business.

A man may manufacture buttons, or he may make million dollar movies. It is not so much what a man does that counts, it's the way he does it. If he follows his own road, is imbued with an unpredictable method of doing things, and dares to stand in glass houses and throw stones, he is the kind of man people like to know. This book is about such a man.

Woodbridge Strong Van Dyke II didn't manufacture buttons, but he did make million dollar movies. In Hollywood, the name of the director Woody Van Dyke is like a touchstone to those people who were associated with him. The minute you mention it they spark. It's like pressing a magic button. "What a man he was!" they say. "Woody Van Dyke — what a guy!"

Norma Shearer, Tyrone Power, Joan Crawford, Clark Gable, James Stewart, Robert Montgomery, Rosalind Russell, among others, speak of Van Dyke with recollections warm and colorful, full of adventure and purpose and high good humor.

Garbo smiles in retrospect as she recalls "The Painted Veil" — "I shall never forget 'One-Take' Woody Van Dyke."

"Believe me," Jack Dempsey explodes, "Prizefightin's easier. You just sock a guy and go home, but not on a Van Dyke picture. You stay in the ring and take it."

Jeanette MacDonald writes, "I found Van Dyke so enigmatical and yet compatible, and then again absolutely pious at times, but always with the most delightful sense of humor."

The General Manager of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios in Culver City, Eddie Mannix, jumps up from his desk at the mere mention of his name. "Nothing chi-chi about that fellow. He just went in there and made motion pictures."

Myrna Loy's eyes reflect a warm glow, "I might still be playing Oriental siren parts if it hadn't been for Woody Van Dyke. Bless his heart!"

One of President Roosevelt's Military Aides, Major General Joseph C. Fegan of the Marine Corps, shakes his head, "Van Dyke? That guy was a steam engine in breeches!"

W. S. Van Dyke II, measured by the dollars and cents his movies made, was probably the most successful, and certainly one of the most influential motion picture directors in Hollywood. His influence is still felt. He made a lot of money, and he had no pretensions. As a matter of fact, out of the fifty or sixty pictures he directed, every one was a hit except one, and that was aptly entitled "Laughing Boy." Woody's associates tried to forget that picture, but Van Dyke remembered it affectionately, and whenever praise became fulsome, or some master-of-ceremony was apt to be carried away in recounting Van Dyke triumphs, Woody found it salutary to remind the assemblage that he was also the director who gave them "Laughing Boy."

The emphasis in most press stories emanating from Hollywood is on its stars. For this reason the layman hasn't come to know that the director is the key, the man who more than any other individual is responsible for the success or failure of a movie. In fact, the stars themselves recognize that the director is not only accountable for the way a picture turns out, but that many a stellar name among their numbers would not have reached the marquee had it not been for the patience, ability and knowledge of the man with the megaphone.

Great enterprise and imagination have helped to make Hollywood a success, but more than anything else it has been the hard work of many of its sincere but unheralded pioneers. The director can be counted among these pioneers.

For sixteen years I knew Woody Van Dyke well and for sixteen years, like most others who knew him, I wondered how he accomplished all that he did. During that span I had spent hours sitting at his elbow, watching him direct movies with a skill that made it look easy.

This man Van Dyke, who measured a picture's success in terms of the money it made — that is, the popular applause it received — was at the same time responsible for much of the transition from slapstick to the more sincere viewpoint in movie making.

We had spent much time together after studio previews talking about audience reaction to his pictures. Many an evening in his home I had asked questions about his adventures and activities in taking motion picture units into Africa, Tahiti, Alaska and Indian Territory in Wyoming, Arizona, and the Mojave Desert in Southern California, and yet I felt I never really knew him.

Others felt the same way; however, what many saw of Woody outwardly in their brief encounters with him but touched the surface of a stream actually very deep, whose currents were swift and strong. Mabel Walker Willebrandt, former Assistant Attorney General of the United States, said, "He was the most spiritual man I ever knew, and yet gave outward appearance of being the least so." He swore, although seldom in the presence of ladies . . . he drank . . . he lived freely. But he didn't lie, cheat, nor would he hurt anyone intentionally. He was as callous and gruff on the surface as any man you will ever meet and yet as sensitive as a great violinist to depth in others. He never judged people outwardly, for he knew his own inner thoughts and therefore knew that what was visible in others' lives could be deceptive.

No motion picture ever offered a theme richer in high adventure than his own life, and no story he directed had a more dramatic ending. Woody Van Dyke passed on February 5, 1943, a Major in the United States Marine Corps Reserve.

A journalist in an Ohio newspaper wrote in headlines, February 8, 1943, "PICTURES LOSE PATHFINDER." And the ensuing first lines read, "If you remember TRADER

HORN and THE THIN MAN series you'll realize that Hollywood lost one of its legends as well as one of its ablest directors in the passing of W. S. Van Dyke II."

One day after I had returned from the war, I was talking with a group of Hollywood actors and studio employees about Van Dyke. The enthusiasm with which they spoke . . . of his complete abandon, and unusual ways of working, brought forth a spontaneous "What a guy!" In reviewing a life so colorful and one so rich in achievement it was not strange that we found ourselves asking the question, "What made this man tick?" It was to seek out the answer to this question, together with the genuine enthusiasm of these people that started me on a quest that turned out to be the most interesting experience of my lifetime. I talked with others about Van Dyke and discovered that with whomever I spoke, the reaction was always the same. I jotted down things I recalled and began piecing them together with what I was being told by Woody's friends and associates. From thumbnail sketches these notes grew into the chapters for this story. I talked with an editor of a large publishing house in the Middle West and he wanted to see it put into a book.

No effort has been made to treat in full detail every phase of Van Dyke's life. That is not the purpose of this book. Nor does this story tell the complete history of the movie. It is simply a yarn that resolves the experiences and associations of many of today's most famous people into an interesting behind-the-scene sketch of a man's life, which in itself is definitive of a too little publicized side of Hollywood.

The material has not been embellished nor elaborated upon. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures generously turned over all files and records on Van Dyke and cooperated in every way possible to provide accurate and complete data. They granted permission to use excerpts and dialogue from the actual shooting scripts of some of Van Dyke's pictures.

The photographs and illustrations used throughout the ensuing pages tell a story in themselves. They are from the private collections of many of Hollywood's greatest names.

Imagine, if you can, as you read this book that Norma Shearer, Tim McCoy, Myrna Loy, Jack Dempsey, and those people whose names appear throughout these pages, are telling you the story — just as they told it to me. It will bring to your view another aspect of the much fabled Hollywood, and at the same time pay tribute to a man who realized that a fable is only as good as the truth it is based upon.

* * *

Start with me at the home of Laura Winston Van Dyke, Woody's mother. A slight, but dynamic gentlewoman, she was naturally greatly interested in what we were doing. She was lovely to talk to but, like Woody, extremely reticent. I had to point questions to make conversation about her son. It was apparent, when I first spoke about Van, that I had touched upon a lifetime of memories she had sealed within her heart that would not be easily revived. These two had been more than mother and son — they had been lifetime companions and partners in their professions. When he had passed on, that world she had known seemed to have gone with him.

Knowing I couldn't come right out and say, "Tell me the story of Woody's life," I suggested that we take a drive. Doll, as Van always called his mother, loved to motor along the coast highway between Santa Monica and Malibu. We headed that way. It is a beautiful drive. While heading north toward Malibu Beach the highway parallels the sheer palisades of Santa Monica on the right, and on the left lies the blue Pacific Ocean, its beaches studded with the glittering-new and decaying-old mansions of Hollywood's past and present greats. The setting was perfect and inspiring. She had made this same trip many times with her son in the past. As we drove by Norma Shearer's lovely home and the great and rambling mansions of Darryl Zanuck, Louis B. Mayer and Marion Davies, I started to ask questions about Van Dyke — things I wanted particularly to know. Where was he born? When? What were the experiences of his early child life? The answers came quietly and freely as though we were both in another world. I made no notes, just conversation, but when I got home I wrote down all that she had told me.

After two weeks of drives and talks, I let her see what I had on paper. I wanted to know what her reaction would be. She had almost forgotten some of the things I had recorded. You see, she had not been aware that I was actually making notes of our talks. That was why she had spoken so freely. A tear or two appeared as she realized I had helped unlock some of her most treasured memories. These revelations opened up new avenues of thought and I found there were many people I must question, and many more things I must now find the answers to.

Cameramen, crewmen and assistants who were associated with Woody over a period of years were contacted and invited to spend an evening together with Van's mother and myself. Among those who came were Clyde DeVinna, head cameraman on the African and Alaskan expeditions; Bob Roberts and Dale Deverman, ace cameramen also on these trips as well as many other Van Dyke pictures; Florence Thomas, executive secretary to Mr. Van Dyke for fifteen years; Bill Lewis, assistant director; Harry Albiez, top flight property man from M-G-M; Pop Arnold, trustworthy stagehand dating back to the Buck Jones days; and Bob Rose, famous stunt man, associated with Van Dyke pictures since the Ruth Roland serials.

I shall never forget that night. We virtually circled the globe in one of the most interesting and fantastic round-robin discussions I had ever heard. The subject matter covered every kind of movie making from serials, quickies, cowboy and Injun pictures, to fabulous million dollar epics. It was a regular potpourri.

I had learned that Van Dyke's first public appearance on the stage had been at the age of three. That he was his mother's leading man in her repertoire company when he was eighteen. That his first job in the movies was in 1915. I had discovered the source of the tremendous drive behind everything he did. Even his early childhood was marked by an explosive but inexhaustible energy that resulted in many fights and numerous problems for others. One great writer interviewed said, "Van's was the ever-present enthusiasm that is part of the nature of every normal child but which, sadly, too often dries up with maturity — except in the case of those rare individuals who possess what the marvelling rest of us, for the want of a better explanation, call genius."

The ensuing interviews included the great and small of both capital and labor in the movie making world. I talked with statesmen, people high in government circles, Marine Corps generals and buck privates who knew Van Dyke. They, too, contributed valuable information. The die was cast and story molded into form. One more interview, and the gathering of the material would be complete. This was with D. W. Griffith, one of the most celebrated names in the motion picture industry.

It was the final interview but it revealed the beginning of Woody's introduction into the motion picture world. I told

Mr. Griffith I had come to talk with him about Woody Van Dyke. "Van Dyke?" he said. "He was an adventurer: everything that man did he made into an adventure. Why, just to know him was an adventure in itself."

When I asked Mr. Griffith if he could recall the incidents that brought to his attention Van Dyke, who, as an extra in a cast of thousands, had nearly ruined one of the most spectacular scenes in "Intolerance" in 1915, the recollections came with a rush.

* * *

One hundred horses turned, backed, weaved in and out as the fifty drivers tried to get their chariots into place. The professional charioteers were in the front positions; the less experienced drivers in the rear.

Hollywood's great spectacle was well under way. The gigantic set for the picture, "Intolerance," was this day the scene of the wild and dangerous charge on the city of Babylon. A young man in flowing robes, with a golden band around his head, was in the extreme rear position. He was perspiring and nervous. Tightly gripping the reins of his two excited horses, he could barely hear what was being said.

"No blunders this time! This is going to be a take!" The director, ahead in his camera car, was shouting through a megaphone. "If a chariot turns over, miss the driver if you can, but keep charging. Make it look good . . . drive hard and fast . . . and don't stop until you get the signal." There was a brief pause. "Stand by for action!" cried the director. A shot was fired, and the race was on. The young man's horses, in the rear position, leaped ahead as if fired from the starter's gun.

"WHOA!! WHOA!! Damn you!" He'd never been in a chariot before. He couldn't hold them back. In less than seconds the young man found himself in the middle of a pack of swearing, screaming, yelling, sweating drivers. One hundred iron-rimmed wheels pounded the hard ground.

The louder he yelled and the harder he pulled on the reins, the faster his horses ran. The noise completely drowned him out. It was no use. He passed one chariot, then another, and another. It was a runaway!

D. W. Griffith was up ahead, setting the pace and directing the spectacle from his camera car. He could not see the trouble heading his way. The action was what he'd asked for but there was a tense, apprehensive look on his face. Suddenly two chariots in the front veered to the side as the runaway came charging up from behind. Wheels collided and two chariots skidded sideways. Griffith jumped to his feet and screamed to the young man, "LOOK OUT!" The driver of the runaway, his robes streaking out behind, braced himself for a spill but the chariots righted themselves. The runaway team surged ahead of the others. The camera car gave a spurt to keep ahead of the action. The frantic efforts of the young man to check his horses were futile. Griffith grabbed his megaphone and shouted, "Stay back there, you fool, stay back!"

"What the hell do you think I'm trying to do?" the driver hoarsely yelled, pulling and jerking on the lines with every ounce of strength he had left. Griffith gave the signal to stop. He had what he wanted on film, despite a near catastrophe. In fact, the runaway had actually given the scene a punch it wouldn't have had otherwise.

Though pleased with the take he had made, Mr. Griffith turned to his first assistant, George Seigman and thundered, "Who is that fool?"

"He's Van Dyke, the young actor who showed you how a Babylonian king should be made up."

Chapter 2

LITTLE LORD FAUNTLEROY VAN DYKE

CHAPTER TWO

Little Lord Fauntleroy Van Dyke

Laura Winston Van Dyke gave birth to her first and only child, W. S. Van Dyke II, in the kitchen of their modest little home in San Diego, California where the bed had been placed because of the illness of her husband. Woody's first experience in this world was a good washing down in the sink.

Grandmother Winston entered the kitchen the day after Woody's birth and, with tears in her eyes, was about to speak. Her daughter didn't give her a chance. "Van Dyke's dead, isn't he, Mother?" she asked. Mrs. Winston took the frightened young mother's hand in hers and said quietly, "Yes, my dear, Van's gone."

Laura Winston had met Woodbridge Strong Van Dyke in San Diego in the late 1880's. W. S. Van Dyke, a young lawyer, was a member of the law firm, Hunsaker and Britt. His was a fine background. The names Woodbridge and Strong were important politically and had been brought together for the first time under Van Dyke's name. The genealogy of the Van Dyke tree, as far as American citizenship is concerned, reaches back to Jan Thomasse Van Dyke, who came to America in 1652 and became one of the founders of Utrecht, and a captain in the Colonial Army. Of the present generation were Henry Van Dyke, famous writer and philosopher and former U. S. Ambassador to the Hague; and John C. Van Dyke, member of the faculty of Rutledge College and art critic, who wrote "Art for Art's Sake."

Laura Winston Van Dyke's background is excellent. Her mother, whose maiden name was Mary Ellen Stewart, was the daughter of one of America's pioneer families, who with their children crossed the plains in '49, by covered wagon, from Marysville, Indiana to Carson City, Nevada. The Stewarts were the first settlers to bring young girls into Carson City, and the daughters all soon married. Mary Ellen Stewart met and married Charles Curry, who owned half of Nevada at the time. However, Curry died suddenly, leaving Mary Ellen with two sons.

Laura Van Dyke's father, Theron Bonaparte Winston, whose family originally owned the famous old Winston cotton and tobacco plantation, was a member of one of the aristocratic "First Families of Virginia" — known as FFV's. Theron Winston, who had been affectionately nicknamed "Tump" by the negroes on their plantation, had come West and acquired mining interests with Charles Curry in New Mexico. When Curry had died, Winston came to Carson City to offer the widow, Mary Ellen, a half interest in his portion of the mining property to help care for the two sons. Winston fell in love with the young widow and two years later they were married. Laura Winston was the first child of Mary Ellen and Theron Winston.

As a young girl in the early days of the West she lived a very colorful life. She followed music as a career and became a concert pianist at the age of eleven.

Miss Winston and Van Dyke were married in San Diego in April 1888. They were the first couple to occupy the bridal suite in the world-famous Coronado Hotel, which the groom's brother, T. S. Van Dyke, had been instrumental in building.

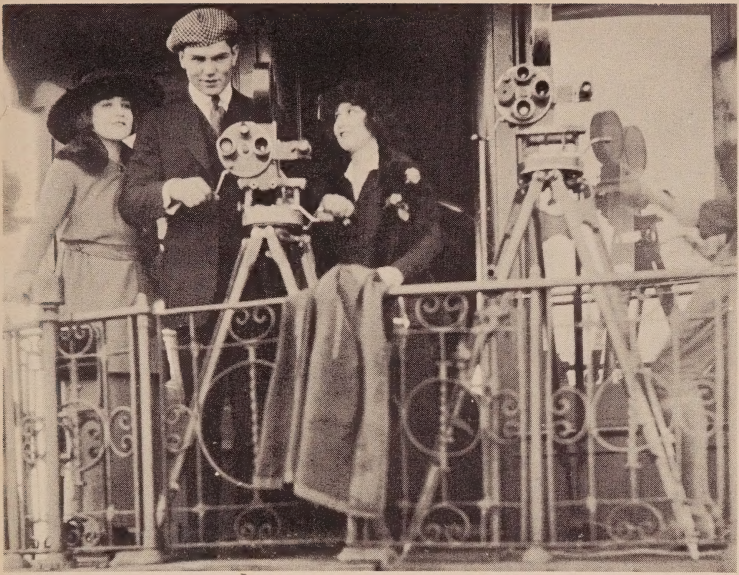
W. S. (Woody) Van Dyke II was born eleven months later, on a Thursday morning in March, 1889. Laura Winston was so suddenly widowed that no insurance was left for her. Her husband had been only twenty-four; they were young and just starting out in life. It had taken all of their money to buy his law books, and, too, he had passed on so suddenly they hadn't thought about insurance. Mrs. Van Dyke sold everything she owned and with this little money to tide her over, returned to her former life as a concert pianist. To re-establish herself professionally, she practised by the hour with Woody in his crib alongside the piano. Van was acquiring an ear for good music.

His mother moved to San Francisco when he was three. However, concert engagements were limited and instead of following her music as a career she became a member of the Morosco Players, a theatrical stock company, at the famous old Morosco Theatre. Van made his stage debut with the Morosco Players as Damon's child in "Damon and Pythias." Both mother and son did fine in this show so Morosco put them in his next play, "Ruth, the Blind Girl." Woody was the "blind girl" in curls and pinafore. He was four then and very popular in the part.

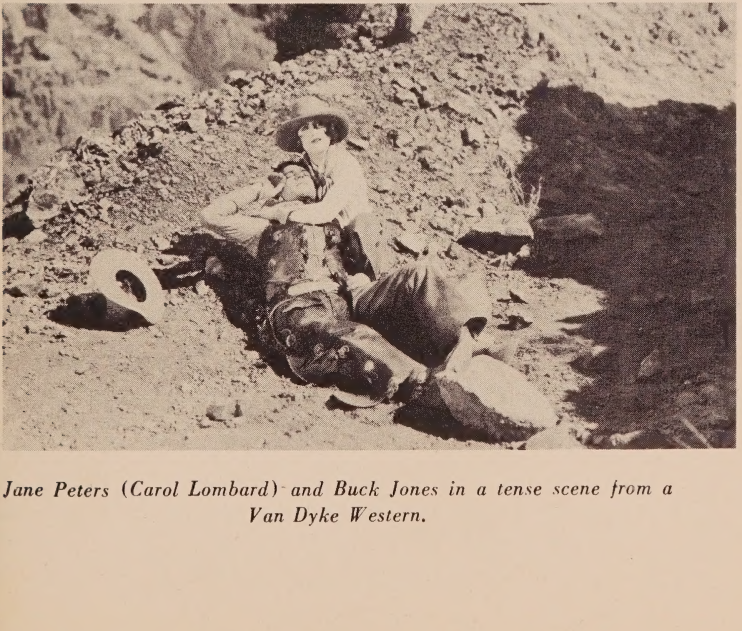
Shortly after this, the Van Dykes went on the road with another company owned by Frank Redich. This was the "Little Lord Fauntleroy" period in American history and, because of his blond curls grown for the little blind girl role, Woody made an ideal Little Lord. His mother wouldn't let him cut off the curls because of the new part he was playing. But the curls and the clothes he wore on the stage pegged Woody as a sissy and since they were on the road most of the time, there was almost always a new fight every Monday.

One day Mrs. Van Dyke heard a terrible commotion on the ramp outside the stage door. Kids were yelling and screaming. She knew what was going on. Rushing to the rescue, she saw Woody's blond curls popping up from the bottom of the pile every now and then, his arms swinging like windmills and his feet flying. The gang quickly dispersed at the sight of Mrs. Van Dyke. Woody, thinking his mother might believe he had started the fight, jumped up from the ground and, with a big black shiner, said, "Did you see me lick 'em, Mom?" A lot of "local boys," however, found out that looks sure could be deceiving. Thus his character was being formulated.

This was the beginning of a partnership of mother and son that lasted throughout many decades. A partnership and bond that brought them both a fullness of life that few people experience.



"Daredevil Jack" Dempsey poses with Josie Sedgwick his leading lady (left), and movie starlet Ruth Langston on platform of Santa Fe train enroute to Mojave Desert location.



Jane Peters (Carol Lombard) and Buck Jones in a tense scene from a Van Dyke Western.

Buck Jones, hero and idol of millions of Americans, and his famous horse Silver. (Buck's untimely death in a Boston fire in November 1942 shocked Van Dyke and the nation. The tragedy happened on the last day of a two weeks' barnstorming tour for the Government to sell War Bonds. By a strange coincidence Buck Jones' former leading lady, Carol Lombard (Jane Peters) lost her life while on a War Bond tour.)

Chapter 3

MOTHER AND SON

CHAPTER THREE

Mother and Son

Mother and son went on the road with the Howe Company. His curls came in handy again for he got the part of Prince Roy in "The Prince And The Pauper." Van was a quick study even then. His mother would read a part to him a couple of times and he would have it memorized. A favorite stunt of his was to learn all of the parts in a play and entertain his mother at home after the evening performance by climbing up on her bed and doing the whole show.

Woody's first graze with the opposite sex was with Queenie Howe, age seven — Van Dyke, six and a half. Van's mother's insistence that he keep his curls because of the parts he was playing started all the trouble with Queenie. She had short black hair and had to wear a wig to make her cute. Van would tease her and dangle his long natural curls in her face. On the stage, to the audience, they appeared very affectionate. Woody would look downstage and say his lines, "Yes, dear," but then turn upstage and make faces at Queenie. This went on for some time until one day they disappeared after the matinee and couldn't be found anywhere. Before long they came out of the cellar of the theatre . . . Woody with a black eye, and Queenie covered with dirt and minus her wig. His mother asked what under the sun had happened. Woody looked her in the eye and calmly said, "Oh, we just went down in the cellar and fought it out." Queenie and Van were the best of friends after that.

Van indicated early in life that he had his own way of doing things. His mother had been teaching him to read stories of famous people which were printed in small books written in words of one syllable. Woody's favorite story was the life of Napoleon. Mrs. Van Dyke noticed, however, that he would read to a certain place in the book, stop, and then go back to the beginning. He repeated this several times. One day she told him the correct way to read a book was from the first page to the last and then start over again. Van said he didn't want to read it that way. He said he didn't like Josephine, so he read about Napoleon until he got to Josephine, then stopped and went back to read about Napoleon again.

The Van Dykes closed with the Howe Company and went into repertoire stock for about five years in Chicago and vicinity, touring Midwestern and Southern states. During those five years, Mrs. Van Dyke used her maiden name, Laura Winston, and played ingenue parts, while Woody played every known child part.

By the time Van Dyke was ten years old he had seven years professional experience in perfecting his sense of timing and action.

Woody learned many simple tricks about costuming while watching his mother sew . . . black oilcloth for boots . . gold ribbon down the sides of breeches to make uniforms . . . A practical knowledge of wardrobe was being added to his background in the theatre. In later years, on such pictures as "Rose Marie," "Marie Antoinette," "Naughty Marietta" and others, many a wardrobe employee found out that Van Dyke knew what he wanted.

Being on the road much of the time, with many one-night stands, schooling was a problem. Mrs. Van Dyke had to act as Woody's schoolteacher as well as mother and play leads in a theatrical stock company. She scheduled a period every morning during which she taught him reading, writing, and arithmetic. As time went on they began playing each town from one to four weeks, so she entered him in the local public schools. When the company moved to another town she took Woody's report card with them and entered him in the next school. Because of this constant moving Van learned early in life how to meet people and make friends quickly. He was never in one spot long enough to have intimate companions, therefore everybody was his friend. He was registered, at one time or another, in almost every grammar school in the Midwest, South, North and Northwest.

One time he decided he wanted an air gun. Although air guns, theatres and hotels didn't mix, his mother didn't say no. Woody started saving his dollars and when he had the necessary price, purchased one. Shortly thereafter the troupe stopped over at a railroad hotel in a small Southern town. Mrs. Van Dyke was busy unpacking when she heard quite a commotion and considerable laughter outside. Going to the window, she saw a big crowd gathered in the street. There was a small colored boy standing in the center of the crowd and Van, with his air gun, stood several paces away. A man gave a signal, the boy stooped over, and Woody slowly raised his air gun to his shoulder. Firmly setting his chin against the stock of the gun, as though he were a crack rifle shot, he took a bead on the crouching boy's posterior, and pop! If he scored a hit, the boy-target would jump up and down and the crowd would roar with laughter. They'd give the boy a nickel . . . he would grin and stoop over again. Woody, soon an expert shot, found targets hard to find. Laura Van Dyke enjoyed the humor of these pranks, but seldom could afford to let the members of the troupe know it — particularly Woody.

Among other accomplishments, Van had now become an excellent horseman. He started hiring horses when seven years old and rode for hours at a time in each town they were in. He also loved swimming and fishing as most boys do.

Woody showed deep concern and a keen affection during these early years for youngsters who didn't have enough to eat or wear. He was always permitted to bring his friends to the hotel for meals. Whether he had been fighting with them in their alleys or playing with them in their back yards, he'd invite them all to dinner. If dirty and without adequate clothing of their own, he'd personally give them baths in the hotel and dress them in some of his clothes. If his little friends were girls, his mother did the bathing and would outfit them. Van always was a royal entertainer. He loved to go into the dining room of a hotel and order dinner for the kids.

Woody learned to travel alone when he was very young. One time when he was seven he went alone by train from Milwaukee to Seattle to visit his grandmother. Wanting company, he picked up a stray cat in the depot and took it all the way, hiding it under his coat so that the conductor couldn't see it. Woody's Uncle Fred was at the grandmother's during this visit when a near calamity took place. He was quietly reading in the living room one day when he heard several shots outside. He was not concerned because dove season was on, but almost simultaneously Woody screamed, "I'm shot! I'm shot!" Fred dropped his book, rushed to the window just in time to see Woody holding his side with his hands, and with a pained look, wince and sink to the ground. The horrified uncle dashed out of the house, picked up the limp boy in his arms only to hear, “Darn it all — now you’ve gone and spoiled my act.” But Uncle Fred didn’t appreciate the “art” of a good performer and Van got a good whaling.

Chapter 4

THE LAURA WINSTON PLAYERS

CHAPTER FOUR

The Laura Winston Players

In 1903 the Laura Winston Players were the feature attraction in Escanaba, Michigan, and Walter Long was one of their regular patrons. Long had been sent to Escanaba by Swift and Company to take charge of their local packing house. Walter's hobby was the theatre and he saw each change of program twice — some of them more. Long had an insatiable desire to watch a play from back-stage but Laura Winston's ruling was "NO VISITORS BACK-STAGE." Try as he did, he couldn't get around this rule. One day the company was staging a drama that called for a scene with a donkey high on a platform upstage. None of the stage-hands, and not even Laura herself, could get the donkey up the ramp onto the platform. Walter Long happened by and seeing their predicament, started to laugh. This irked Laura Winston no end and she said, "If you think it's so funny, why don't you put him up there yourself?" Walter, being a smart businessman, made a deal right then and there. "I'll have him up there in a jiffy if you'll let me see the show from back-stage." The deal was made. Long picked up the frightened little donkey as if it were a side of beef and, bingo, it was on the platform. Walter Long saw the show from the wings and this incident started a friendship that lasted many years. He became so intrigued with back-stage life of the theatre that he talked the stage manager into letting him play a dead man in a scene shortly thereafter. He then became bolder and soon was cast as the fourth man in a game of cards, and so on until he started speaking lines. One play called for a gorilla and the company seemed stuck. Long, who had been experimenting with different kinds of makeup on the side, surprised them all by showing up as a perfect gorilla. Laura Winston recognized a great talent for character makeup and took him as a regular member of the cast. When the company left Escanaba, Long quit Swift and Company and went on the road with the troupe. He learned much about character studies with the Laura Winston Players. In later years he became one of the great character actors of the screen and he has always been grateful to Mrs. Van Dyke for her help. It was while with the Laura Winston Players that Walter Long came to know Woody Van Dyke and think of him as one of the best little actors he had ever seen.

* * *

Now fourteen, Woody, having finished the eighth grade wanted to go to high school or business school. His mother told him she could pay his expenses if he went to high school in Seattle and lived with his grandmother, but she couldn't afford the tuition of a business school. Van decided to go to business school and said he would work his way through. He left the Laura Winston Players and went to Seattle, where he moved in with his grandmother until he lined up a job. Tall, and amazingly strong, he easily passed for a lad of eighteen. He clerked in a grocery store . . . did janitor work in a school . . . waited on tables . . . anything to make money for his tuition. He took a job as call boy in a Seattle railroad station, became a door-to-door salesman for vacuum cleaners and even drove an express wagon. He studied hard and finished his business course as an honor student.

Woody went to Ashford, Washington, to work in a lumber camp. Located at the foot of Mount Rainier, Ashford consisted principally of a country store and a railroad station. It was here that he met his first love, Zina Ashford. A pretty, titian-haired girl, she was the daughter of the store's proprietor, after whom the town was named. Zina became Mrs. W. S. Van Dyke II. After the wedding, Van rejoined his mother's repertoire company and took his wife on the road.

Handsome and debonair, Van Dyke played the leading parts opposite his mother. This was a most unusual combination and few people knew they were mother and son because Mrs. Van Dyke had continued to be billed as Laura Winston. Their repertoire consisted of fifty-two plays ranging from "Jim, The Westerner" to "Lucrezia Borgia," and Van played the lead in every one of them.

After two years, Van Dyke realized that theatricals and married life, as he and Zina were living, would not work out. He felt, too, that it would be good for him to break up the family combination of playing leads opposite his mother. He took Zina with him and joined the Vin Moore Company as leading man and went on the road with them alone for a year.

Completing his tour with the Vin Moore Company, he again played lead opposite his mother who was leading lady with the Del Lawrence Stock Company in Spokane.

Van Dyke began outwardly to show an intense interest in the man who sweats and works for a living. Discussions in train smokers, hotel lobbies and theatre dressing rooms found him unafraid to express his views candidly on controversial questions. Once while working in a lumber camp near Ashford, he had had an experience that made a deep and lasting impression on him. The men worked twelve hours a day and the pay was small. An accident occurred resulting in the loss of an arm to a lumberjack. Because the man was no longer useful he was released from his job. No provision was made for the unfortunate man or his family. Van Dyke didn't like that — and he never forgot it. Each succeeding year he became more actively interested in things that would aid in providing an intelligent solution to such problems wherever he found them. His was not just kindly sentiment but genuine compassion for mankind. He felt every man was entitled to earn enough to meet his own needs and on many occasions in later years his acts evidenced his stand on this point.

The Del Lawrence Company closed the season and the Van Dykes returned to Ashford, Washington for a much needed rest. Woody loved the mountains, especially his old favorite — Mount Rainier. He liked its broad streams, the snow, its wild life — in fact, all the majestic grandeur of this mighty sentinel of the great Northwest. During this visit his mother again noticed Woody's inclination to write. The first indication of that talent had been when at eighteen she found him writing a poem which he had titled "Rebuke." He was now more mature in years and experience, having characterized important parts in over fifty-two plays. He had developed a vivid imagination and would sit in quiet meditation at the base of the mountain and write by the hour. The depth of character in these writings revealed the heart of this man who was one day to set the pace for the motion picture industry in turning out consistent box office hits. The titles of such poems as "Age," "Appreciation," "Lament," "Revenge," "Sarcasm," "Seasons," and "Strength" were indicative of the thinking of this young man.

Van Dyke's moods were as variable as the winds. One minute a poem . . . the next, a Wild West story — each written with the same ease and enthusiasm.

* * *

During their vacation in Ashford Laura Van Dyke made one of the most important decisions in her life. She realized Van Dyke was becoming attached to country life. After all, his father-in-law owned the only store in town. Zina and Van were assured of a comfortable living. Here was security and a home.

Van's mother knew Woody too well: with his energy and drive, his vivid imagination and love of the theatre, he could never really be happy in such a quiet life. While it might appeal to him, he would soon rebel but it might be too late. Never one to procrastinate, Laura Winston Van Dyke acquired a sketch suitable for the road and signed a year's contract with Alexander Pantages to play his circuit. The skit required a young man of Van's age. The Van Dykes went back on the stage.

Van was appearing with his mother in this act on the Pantages circuit. They had opened a one year contract in Seattle a few weeks before, and were playing Los Angeles en route East. Van's mother had been corresponding with her former character man, Walter Long, about motion pictures and the way Griffith did things. Long was working in "The Birth of a Nation." She had tried to get Van interested, but it was no use for his heart was set on the stage, and furthermore, he viewed the movies with considerable skepticism. He said they'd never take the place of the theatre.

Upon arrival in Los Angeles, Van's mother arranged a supper party and had Walter Long bring several members of the cast of "Birth of a Nation" as guests. Their enthusiastic description of the movies aroused Van Dyke's curiosity. He decided to take a whirl at this new kind of show business. His mother pointed out that her Pantages contract would provide them both with enough money for a year even if the movies didn't work out. Woody agreed. Laura Winston Van Dyke broke a new man into the act and left on Saturday night for Winnipeg, Canada. Walter Long told Van Dyke to be at the studio Monday and he would get him a job.

Chapter 5

A BABYLONIAN KING

CHAPTER FIVE

A Babylonian King

Van Dyke reported to the Majestic Studio, 4200 Sunset Boulevard, the following Monday and with all of the assurance in the world walked up to the window and said, "My name's Van Dyke."

"Okay, Van Dyke. Take a seat on the mourners' bench."

"Mourners' bench? I want the casting office."

"That's it," a policeman said, pointing to a group of men sitting on a bench outside the gate. "Pick out a seat, bub, and wait 'till you're called."

Woody chuckled as the policeman turned and left. The enormous "Intolerance" set across the street fascinated him. He began to think, maybe this is going to be all right. Looking the situation over and spotting a fellow on one of the benches who looked as if he might know something about this new business, Woody walked over and introduced himself.

"Van Dyke's my name."

The man on the bench replied, "Mine's Erich von Stroheim. Have a seat."

In their conversation, Von Stroheim told him that twelve of the finest artists in France had been brought to America to design and construct the statuary required in the picture. The enormous "marble" elephants on Belshazzar's palace, he said, were made of papier maché — but were perfect reproductions of the originals.

Von Stroheim was called. Van Dyke sat alone, greatly impressed, wondering what his own assignment would be.

Walter Long came and said, "I told George Seigman, Mr. Griffith's first assistant, all about you, Van, and I'm sure you'll be called. Just be patient, sit here and wait." He did. For five days he waited . . . from seven in the morning until six at night . . . with Walter Long hollering a little louder every day! Mr. Griffith's patience was being tried, too. No one could give him an authentic makeup of a Babylonian king. But Walter Long finally convinced Mr. Griffith — through Seigman, of course — that there was a young fellow on the mourners' bench who could give him just what he'd been looking for. Van Dyke was summoned and told what was wanted. The next thing Mr. Griffith knew, there stood his Babylonian king. D. W. took one look at Van Dyke, grunted, and walked off the set. That was too much. Van Dyke gave Walter Long a dirty look and said, "Five days on that damn mourners' bench for this?" The Babylonian king made a bee-line for the dressing room. The door slammed shut. Tearing off his beard, Woody decided his career in the movies had ended.

When he got to the studio gate, however, he was handed a notice to report for work the next day. His assignment read, "Babylonian King."

Walter Long caught Woody at the gate. Griffith, he explained thought the makeup fine. He was simply so provoked to think that a young man could walk in from the mourners' bench and give him just what he wanted, he had stormed off the set in disgust at his own staff. Van Dyke chuckled, for makeup of Biblical characters had been a hobby of his from early childhood.

He reported for work the next day and before his first week was over, found himself all absorbed in every phase of this new and fascinating business. But his career came close to an abrupt end, when as a charioteer, he nearly upset the charge upon the city of Babylon: D. W. Griffith shouted, "Who is that fool?"; his assistant, George Seigman, said, "He's Van Dyke, the young actor who showed you how a Babylonian king should be made up."

Griffith thundered, "If he's a character actor, what's he doing driving a chariot?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Well, find out! And tell that young scalawag I want to see him."

Woodbridge Strong Van Dyke II came . . . in bedraggled garb. His face was flushed and dirty. But it was a strong face, intelligent, with lower jaw well set. There was an alertness about him, like a fighter ready and waiting for the bell. His blue eyes looked directly at Mr. Griffith.

"Well, sir!" he said.

D. W. asked, "What happened out there?"

"My horses ran away."

"Did you ever drive a chariot before?"

"No, but I've driven a four-horse chuck wagon."

"That doesn't qualify you as a charioteer! Aren't you the actor I hired to make up as a Babylonian king?"

"Everybody's been doubling, sir!"

"Not as charioteers!"

"No, sir."

"Then what are you doing driving one?"

"It paid fifteen dollars extra."

D. W. smiled but spoke sternly when he said, "Fifteen dollars? You young fool, you might have ruined the shot and cost me several thousand dollars. Go back to makeup and stay there!"

Woody Van Dyke about-faced and headed for the makeup tent. He ripped the gold band from his head impatiently, "Damn it, I'm not a makeup man." But the next day he was assigned fifteen hundred warriors to have made up and ready for work by nine o'clock each morning for a week. He rounded up several of his legitimate stage associates to assist in this job and made Bob and Eva McKenzie, dramatic actors, captains. Van and the McKenzies worked out an idea — a "production line" — to speed up the job and be certain the men would be ready when called.

Woody and his makeup crew had to work throughout the night making hundreds of beards. Long strands of crepe hair were curled with curling irons heated on small gas stoves. The hair was then clipped to proper lengths and attached to strips of burlap. At six o'clock each morning the actors lined up outside the makeup tent. A signal was given by Woody and the production line started rolling. Bearded warriors were turned out by the hundreds. As the men entered the tent, Bob McKenzie would slap a gob of LePage's glue on each actor's chin and Eva McKenzie and her assistants would stick on the black curls as the men passed by. Woody's idea proved to be a whiz in getting the beards on but at the end of the first day a dozen warriors got Bob McKenzie in a corner and wanted to know how to get the darn things off.

Bob sent them to Van Dyke who laughed . . . "It was our job to put 'em on; it's yours to get 'em off."

The next day, however, Woody thought up another short cut. He cornered Elmer Clifton, one of George Seigman's assistants, and told him that he had worked out a device that would simplify putting on the beards. He showed Clifton how he had taken some wire and made a cup affair that fit over the chin, and then made what optometrists call "temples" to fasten over the ears and hold the cup in place. Curls had been attached to the wire cup and by this method beards could be hooked onto the men's ears with the ease and speed of putting on a pair of glasses, thus eliminating the glue on their chins. Elmer Clifton thought the idea okay and Van Dyke's makeup crew spent the night gluing beards to wire gadgets.

Delighted with his ingenious invention, Woody was having a great time on the set the next day until he heard Mr. Griffith scream . . . "WHAT KIND OF WARRIORS ARE THESE?" . . . Van Dyke and Clifton exchanged glares. The actors had pushed their beards up over their eyes to shade them from the sun and reflectors.

* * *

The week was over. That makeup job was done. Woody again found time to see what was being done elsewhere on the lot. He went over to the set that represented the wall surrounding the city of Babylon. It was fifty to one hundred twenty-five feet in height. Huge circus nets were being set up forty feet below the top of the wall. Woody inquired what the nets were for. He was told they were to catch the men as they leaped over the side in the big battle scene the next day.

He looked up at the high wall, — "Some jump!" Across the way, Woody saw a sign in front of a tent — "Acrobats Wanted." He asked about that, too. The acrobats were to be the warriors who leaped into the nets. Why acrobats? Because, he was told, they knew how to land properly in a net. Anybody but an acrobat would break his neck in a jump like that. It paid fifteen dollars extra.

"Fifteen dollars? Put me down with the acrobats!"

The next day the huge wall teemed with activity as the stage was set for action. The acrobats' bodies were painted black and brass rings fastened in their ears to make them look the part of vicious barbarian warriors. They were placed on top of the wall and told to make the fight look good. The assistant director yelled through his megaphone, "This wall is just wide enough for three chariots and when they come charging abreast into the scene, jump, and jump quick!"

"Chariots?" Van Dyke yelled, "Up here?"

"Places, everybody!"

The assistant told Mr. Griffith everything was ready. D. W. gave the signal from the camera elevator and the action was on. Woody was in the thick of it. Spears, clubs, swords, shields and even teeth were flying. Ferociously fighting his way through the Babylonians, he saw the chariots come charging into the scene. Over the top of the wall, hindside foremost, went "barbarian" Van Dyke. He turned completely over in mid-air and landed in the net, flat on his stomach. The force of the blow knocked his wind out and sent his earrings sailing through the air. He bounded back up into space, turned gracefully over again, this time landing on his back in the net with arms out-stretched, still clutching his spear. He lay there for a moment, motionless. Slowly his head moved one way and then the other. There was a sigh of relief, his neck wasn't broken. He sat up in the net, shook himself and blinked his eyes a couple of times. In a moment it was raining warriors all around him. He bounced out of the net and headed for wardrobe to get rid of his gear. A friend saw him hobble into the building and said,"How do you like being an acrobat?" Woody laughed, "All right — so I'm not an acrobat!"

Although he had been assigned to makeup there were numerous mob scenes in which everyone acted — property men, carpenters, wardrobe employees and even the office staff. Few, however, except tried and true actors, were used in close-ups. Woody was always a sure-fire bet for these. A two-legged firecracker by nature, Van Dyke was living every stretch of imagination he'd ever dreamed or read about as a kid, and he loved it. Since starting in the movies he'd been a Babylonian king, a high priest and a bareback rider; a groomsman for Bessie Love's husband in the wedding scene in which Jesus turned the water into wine. He'd been a charioteer, a Christian soldier, and now, a vicious barbarian.

Mr. Griffith told Seigman, "That fellow Van Dyke would make a good captain."

Eight to ten thousand people were employed in battle scenes that were almost too realistic. It was impossible to direct these battles with a megaphone, so D. W. used two hundred and fifty captains. The captains would first be rehearsed in the signals to advance, retreat, etc. After a thorough briefing they would each rehearse a portion of the entire company. Mr. Griffith would then photograph, from his specially-constructed camera elevator, mass action shots of a magnitude never before seen.

Van Dyke did a fine job as captain and was soon made a second assistant director. He was getting a taste of movies on a big scale. The theatre had never offered such excitement.

Walter Long was right.

* * *

Now, a second assistant director! Van Dyke was really happy! He carried Griffith's chair, brought him his coffee — anything just to be at the director's elbow to observe what he was doing.

Shortly after this his mother returned from the East, her Pantages contract completed. She knew from Woody's letters that he was doing fine. He told her that he wanted to stay with "Intolerance" until it was finished so she remained in Los Angeles.

In the ensuing months, Van Dyke took it all in. No detail of Griffith's methods escaped his attention. What he didn't learn by observation he acquired by inquisition. George Seigman told him D. W. finished "The Birth of a Nation" on a Saturday and started shooting "Intolerance" the following Monday. This, he explained, was Mr. Griffith's way of keeping his mind occupied during the day so he would have a fresh outlook when cutting "The Birth of a Nation" at night.

Woody drank it in. He had observed that the activity about him was enough to keep anybody's mind occupied in the daytime, let alone try and cut a picture of the magnitude of "The Birth of a Nation" at night. Van Dyke changed his idea about the movies. He now saw that it called for skill, vision, and a creative mind, and he was greatly impressed.

The next big event on the "Intolerance" shooting schedule was to be the filming of the great finale.

This scene called for all hands. D. W.'s specially-constructed camera elevator was to be employed in making the shot. Woody wanted to get up on that elevator.

The camera elevator, six stories high — sixty five feet — was erected on a railroad flat car so that it could be moved on special tracks to advantageous positions.

When the time came to shoot the scene and Mr. Griffith stepped onto the deck of the contraption, Van Dyke was there with his chair and a cup of coffee. The elevator ascended to the top — with Van Dyke aboard.

Griffith wasted no time, "Roll 'em," he said.

Van was directly behind the camera as the action started. It was a long shot of Belshazzar's palace and the walls of the city, taking in the entire cast of four thousand. The flat car approached the palace with the camera "panning" across the uppermost section of the wall and, as the elevator started to descend slowly, swung across the face of the set. The scope of the lens was then brought into focus on the long staircase at the bottom of the set and as the car moved in closer, the elevator and camera were lowered to the level of the marble stairs. Step by step, the elevator was raised and an individual insert made of each principal in the cast.

That was the longest panoramic shot ever photographed.

Woody was convinced. He had found his niche. It was not the stage. It was motion pictures.

He made an opportunity to talk with Mr. Griffith and asked him outright if he thought it would be wisdom for him to give up his profession as an actor and follow production.

D. W. smiled and said, "I can't tell you that. But I can tell you a man should do the thing he's happiest doing, for that's the thing he can do best."

"Intolerance" was completed in 1916. The final cut was fourteen thousand feet and took three hours to run. The original version was eighteen thousand feet and ran four hours, but the exhibitors thought it too long.

Critics did not consider the movies a permanent medium for theatricals. They didn't appreciate the technique employed and furthermore the story, from their viewpoint, was too radical. Consequently the reviews were not good.

Realizing that "Intolerance" was beyond the comprehension of critics, audience and exhibitors alike, Mr. Griffith decided to devote his time to less pretentious productions. He cut down his staff considerably.

W. S. Van Dyke, who was by now a first assistant director, was among those released.

Hollywood's great motion picture spectacle was history. Radical though the story of "Intolerance" was, Mr. Griffith's production ideas and technique had awakened a new industry to its potentialities. The movie was no longer a passing fancy. It was here to stay. And with it, to stay, was W. S. Van Dyke II.

Chapter 6

FIRST ASSIGNMENT

CHAPTER SIX

First Assignment

In 1916 the movies were a going concern and good-looking young men who could act were at a premium in Hollywood. Wallace Reid, since playing "Jeff," the blacksmith in "The Birth of a Nation," had become the movies' most popular male star. His phenomenal success at the box office had put other producers on the lookout for likely candidates who could be groomed into similar spots.

Van Dyke, prior to his work in "Intolerance," had been considered one of the most promising young leading men on the legitimate stage. Just twenty-seven, and an accomplished actor, his features so closely resembled those of Reid that when he left Griffith at Majestic Studios he was made a lucrative offer by another studio to become a movie star — big money, publicity and all that goes with it.

Seldom does one get an opportunity like this. It sounded good. Van talked it over with his mother and wife. His mother thought it too good to pass up.

"But," Van said, "suppose I click as a star. It could only last for a few years at best, and then I'd have to start playing character parts."

His mother knew what he said was true for she was just beginning to experience that very thing on the stage.

But that was not really what was in back of Van Dyke's mind. It was D. W. Griffith's sound, kindly advice: "A man should do what he is happiest doing, for that's the thing he can do best!" Woody knew he'd never been happier in his life than when working for Griffith as an assistant director.

He made his decision quickly. Acting, and the legitimate theatre, as far as Van Dyke was concerned, was a closed book.

His attention now turned wholly to movies and production. Woody picked out the next director he wanted to meet and met him.

Jimmy Young, top flight director on the Lasky lot, listened intently while Van told him of his experiences in "Intolerance," and his desire to learn the movie business.

The next day Van Dyke reported to work at the Lasky Studio as assistant to Mr. Young. Among the stars on the Lasky lot were Geraldine Farrar, Blanche Sweet, Lou Tellegen, Marie Doro, Theodore Roberts, Raymond Hatton and Hobart Bosworth.

Young, the husband of Clara Kimball Young, was considered one of the best directors in the business. He gave Van Dyke every opportunity he asked for. He dressed the stage, set props, checked makeup, typed daily reports, had a hand in rewrites, and even aided in cutting the negative and editing the film, among other things.

Van Dyke soon found that the stage and the movies were two different worlds. When he had first gone to work for Griffith, he couldn't understand why they didn't all learn their parts and photograph the story and act the play all the way through, just like they did on the stage. But he discovered that the problems of movie-making were legion, as compared with those of the legitimate theatre.

In the movies the "stage" is the film. And to get the story on film presented many complicated problems. Even though a set might be ready . . . cast rehearsed, wardrobe and make-up all in order . . . a scene can't be photographed until the lights are properly set. Van Dyke thought much valuable time was wasted while waiting for a man with a little dark glass to run all over the stage checking light. But it didn't take him long to learn that without adequate light there was no point in even starting the cameras. Patience was one of the first lessons Van Dyke acquired in movie-making. And photography was a most important key. Composition, proper background, right makeup, scope and range of lens, close shots, long shots, iris dissolves, moving the camera in and out with the action . . . all had been observed as important technique.

Van Dyke was learning a new and strange theatrical terminology. To "shoot" meant to photograph a scene; a "pan shot" was a panoramic effect, or any scene where the camera sweeps an area. "Prop" — short for property — meant a chair, lamp, table, scarf, cigarette holder, or anything used in a scene. And, unlike the legitimate theatre, instead of starting their play at the beginning, the movie might start photographing the middle of the story first, or even the final scene. Much depended upon what sets were ready and many times problems would arise that necessitated jumping to other scenes and completely changing schedules. Weather was a factor and they had to take advantage of that too when it came along. Cameras would hold only so much film so the length of shots was limited. There was no need for the actors to learn entire scenes.

Each shot photographed, and the film for each days work, had to be carefully marked and logged to keep the story sequence in order. A script girl had to mark down every shot that was made and keep an accurate record of the most minute detail. How was the star's hair combed . . . did the hero have a bow tie or four-in-hand . . . was his coat buttoned or wasn't it . . . These were extremely important details for if a continuation of the same scene were shot the following day, or in the next few days and such a record were not kept, the star would be apt to wear a bow tie as he entered the room and when he turned around have on a four-in-hand. Woody discovered that the director must have a thorough knowledge of the story he was photographing or he might get all mixed up and entirely lose his perspective.

Van Dyke asked more questions than any man Mr. Young ever met but he answered them all. Woody did as thorough a job of learning the movie business as he had done in acquiring stage technique.

Young recognized a great talent in his new assistant and soon let him do all of his cutting. Even though working for Jesse L. Lasky, Van always considered Mr. Young the boss and kept as close to his elbow as he had to D. W. Griffith's.

The movie was still a new business and there was considerable shifting around. Jimmy Young was made an excellent offer by Essanay Studios in Chicago, accepted, and asked Van Dyke if he would like to go with him. Woody agreed. But before leaving Lasky, Young let Van Dyke direct one scene by himself, just to see what he could do. The scene was one with Marie Doro, Hobart Bosworth and Theodore Roberts. Roberts didn't know that Van Dyke had himself been a leading man on the stage, and the two had an argument about how the scene should be played. Roberts considered Woody a young apprentice just learning the business but he agreed, at Van Dyke's insistence, to do the scene both ways to see which was better. Woody was also cutter on the film. His own version stayed in.

Essanay was owned by "Broncho Billy" Anderson, the Western star, and George K. Spoor. The studio name simply spelled out the initials "S" and "A." Essanay rated high in the movie world. They had such featured stars as Francis X. Bushman, Beverly Bayne and Charlie Chaplin. Bryant Washburn was with them at the time Van Dyke arrived, as was a new comic, Wallace Beery. With "Broncho Billy" starring in their Western pictures, the lot was a going concern.

"Broncho Billy" soon discovered Van had a great talent for writing outdoor action dramas, especially cowboy stories, so he let him write a couple for him. This was duck soup for Woody as he had read every cowboy and Injun dime novel he could get his hands on from the time he was ten.

One day, in the middle of a picture, Young was unexpectedly called to New York and wired Van Dyke to take over and finish the film. Van did such a good job he was given an assignment as a regular director and writer.

During this period with Essanay, Woody learned much more about making movies. They were a large firm but were having difficulty in meeting a production schedule. They lacked organization. Their method of working was sort of catch-as-catch-can. No one seemed to know when a picture would be finished. A company would start shooting a story when suddenly the director realized he needed a dog. They would stop work while an assistant dashed madly out to find a dog. It was this way on all sets with props and everything else. Mr. A. W. Mahone, president of Essanay and the businessman of the outfit, began to figure the amount of time wasted as a result of this method of shooting, and time is money in movie-making. One director would take three weeks to finish a two or three-reeler that other directors could turn out in four days. He called all of the directors into his office, asked them if they would like a substantial raise of $25 per week and work only eight hours a day, five days a week. Immediately Van Dyke wanted to know what the catch was. The president of Essanay assured him there was no catch. Mahone pointed out that all he wanted them to do was to let him know every Monday what they would shoot on each of the remaining four days. The directors still felt there was some joker in the deal, but Mahone then explained his plan. All he wanted to know was what they would need in the way of props and sets during the week, and a list of these was to be turned over to construction. The required sets for the remainder of the week were to be built in advance, each already supplied with the necessary props. This new production schedule was put into effect and thus was formulated a fundamental plan for laying out a shooting schedule. It proved a great time and money saver and was profitable for both management and staff.

Van Dyke had learned another trick in the business of movie-making.

Shortly afterward, Mr. Spoor asked Van Dyke if he would like to open, and take charge of, their new studio in California. Woody leaped at the opportunity, sent his mother a wire telling her of his good fortune and asked her to meet him at the station in Los Angeles.

The movie had brought about a great change in the lives of these two people, especially his mother. Woody's enthusiasm had convinced her that she should learn this new kind of show business, too. While Van was getting his feet on the ground in Chicago, she had given up her career as leading lady on the legitimate stage and had taken a job as character woman on the Vitagraph lot.

Six-footer Van Dyke got off the train with a suitcase in one hand and a tiny blue birdcage in the other. After a warm embrace, his mother said, "What under the sun are you doing with that little finch, Woody?" He replied casually, "Him? Oh, he worked all through that last picture with us and I just couldn't leave the little guy all alone in Chicago." Laura recognized the same old Van Dyke and recalled how when he was seven he found a cat in the station at Milwaukee and took it to Seattle while traveling alone. He loved animals and he liked company.

Essanay's California studio was located in Culver City. It consisted of one building about twenty-five by forty-five feet, which included the stage and front office. Limited funds and lack of experienced help in building sets made it necessary for Van Dyke to keep most of the action out-of-doors. He had no lights for indoor work so a canvas skylight was devised for a roof over the stage that could be pulled back to let the sunlight in. This meant all their work had to be done in the daytime.

The production staff consisted of Van Dyke, production manager . . . Van Dyke, director . . . Van Dyke, writer . . . Van Dyke, casting . . . Van Dyke, makeup . . . et cetera. His three assistants were his mother — character parts and wardrobe; Jack Gardner — the original "Chocolate Soldier" man of musical operetta fame as leading man and assistant in production; a cameraman, and "a" camera. The laboratory work and printing of negatives was done by the Hawsley Laboratory.

The big problem was the weather. Without the sun they couldn't shoot. If it rained, no work was done, even if the take was indoors, as the canvas skylight had to be closed. The sun was the key. Southern California had become the production center for the movie because of its abundant sunshine and lack of rain during certain seasons. But, California had fogs . . . some high . . . some low. Van's company would go out at daybreak to be ready to shoot if the sun came out. They remained on location until sundown to take advantage of every peek Sol made through the California fog. There were days when they only got in a couple of hours shooting.

Van and his mother were cronies and they had a great time making these wild and woolly Westerns. They had been on the stage together for years. She was as enthusiastic and interested in everything he did as he was himself, and vice versa. When he gave her a job in his company, he told her to use her stage name, Laura Winston, as he didn't want to be accused of going Hollywood on his first job by putting his relatives to work. Frequently between scenes or after the day's work they would walk to the car with arms about each other's shoulders.

Woody had his first experience in how quickly a Hollywood "scandal" can start. To those in his company who did not know her real identity, it appeared that Laura Winston was getting too much attention from Van Dyke. You'd hear, "Did you notice how she made up to him last night?" Buzz, buzz, buzz! The girls were convinced that Laura was playing up to the director for a break in pictures. Some of them were playing for a break, too, but not just in pictures. During periods in the dressing rooms and while riding the bus to and from locations, Miss Winston heard some rare stories on how some of the girls expected to land the handsome director.

One day between scenes, Van's mother was kidding him about the hit he'd made with the girls and told him he'd better look out. Woody laughed, threw his arms around her neck, kissed her and said, "You haven't a thing to worry about, Miss Winston." One of the more jealous objectors saw this act. Miss Winston was moving in. The girl felt it was her "duty" to do something about it, so she went to Van Dyke's wife. When Zina Van Dyke heard the story she thanked the young lady for being so "sweet" and assured her she could take care of the situation.

When Zina told Woody about it he thought it was a great joke and decided to give the girls their money's worth. His mother, not knowing what Van was up to, thought he was getting unusually affectionate. On one occasion he kissed her as no mother was ever kissed by a son. The conversation that followed in the dressing room convinced her the girls had better know the truth.

To get their attention, she had to take off her shoe and bang it on the table. "Now listen here!" she said, "before you go any further with this conversation, I think you'd better know I am Van Dyke's mother!" There was a sudden lull. But not for long. One ambitious starlet piped up, "Yeah — and I'm his grandmother!" It took a lot of explaining, even from Van Dyke's wife, before the girls would believe it was true, especially the one who had gone to Zina a few days before.

Casting was a difficult problem. Many professional actors still looked down upon the movie as a cheap medium and wouldn't have anything to do with it. Especially was this true of Western melodrama. For this reason, the movie maker found himself looking for "types" most of the time, rather than actors and one couldn't be choosy in the selection of actors. Therefore, casting as well as acting was very amateurish at times. Van Dyke found himself in this position more than once, but he was not concerned, for he had learned by now that the movie was primarily a pictorial record of people's emotions, be they lusty or meek. Dialogue was on film on the screen so it didn't make any difference what kind of a voice a fellow had. In fact, Van Dyke preferred "types."

He was having difficulty in casting the part of a wealthy cattle rancher for his current picture when his uncle, Will Bryant, dropped in for a visit. Bryant had never had anything to do with theatricals, but he did have a meticulously trim goatee, a stately stride, and was a perfect "type" — just what Van Dyke had been looking for. Woody spotted the goatee, slapped him on the back and said, "Uncle Will, you're in the movies! Just the type for my cattle rancher."

As in all Westerns, there was to be a chase. Van didn't want Uncle Will to hazard the ride so he made arrangements for a rider to double for him in the actual run. To avoid offending the old man, Van kept quiet about the double. After completing some close-ups of Bryant on a horse, it was necessary to take "the" camera and cameraman to the bottom of the hill to shoot the chase. Arriving there, Van Dyke sent the double back up to replace Uncle Will. Uncle Will was seventy, and Van didn't want to embarrass him in front of all those real cowboys, so he instructed the double to tell him that he was substituting for him in the ride. Everything was set for the chase. The double disappeared over the hill. In a few moments a signal was given and down the hill they came, lickety split, a rough, tough gang of real cowboys, about twenty-five of them, hell bent for election. What a shot! Van was jumping up and down, megaphone in hand, screaming orders, when suddenly he froze as the riders came into close range. There, right in front, was Uncle Will leading the pack, "yippee-ki-yi-ing" louder and wilder than any young buck in the outfit.

Will Bryant hadn't wanted to embarrass his nephew in front of the cowboys by telling him that he had been an expert horseman all his life. After all, Van Dyke didn't ask if he could ride — he'd just looked at his goatee and said, "You're hired!" When the double had informed Uncle Will that he was to substitute for him in the chase, Uncle Will punched him in the nose, leaped on his horse and the chase was on.

* * *

Van Dyke made four pictures for Essanay: "The Land of Long Shadows," "Open Spaces," "Men of the Desert," and "Our Little Nell." He wrote, directed and cut them all at a total production cost of $20,000, receiving a nice bonus for his fast and excellent work. He gave a substantial sum to his mother for having retired from the stage to join him in his new venture, and bought his wife her first set of furs.

In 1917 the war in Europe was taking a turn for the worse. Essanay closed their California studio and turned to the manufacture of cameras in Chicago. Van Dyke stayed in California. He felt the United States would become involved in the war and wanted to arrange his affairs so he would be ready to go if called.

The lid did blow off the European conflict, America became involved in the fight, and World War I was here. Van Dyke was drafted but before he even had a chance to get in the fight, the war was over and he returned to the precarious calling of free-lance movies.

Chapter 7

HIS LAST THIRTY-FIVE CENTS

CHAPTER SEVEN

His Last Thirty-Five Cents

Many changes took place in Hollywood during the war, and since Van Dyke at best had been known only as a Western or Serial Director, he was kicked around considerably on his return to the business. And, to make matters worse, fabulous stories of great wealth and easy money had spread throughout the nation and the movie-struck headed West by the thousands. It was like the rush to the Yukon . . . the same lust for fame and fortune. Hollywood overflowed with every type. Few made easy money. Most of them went hungry. A job here. A job there.

The only work Woody could get was for independents, those makers of "quickies" along "Poverty Row," because of his previous experience. No retakes on this job, for the "indies" never spent a penny for film unless it got on the screen. This proved to be one of the most valuable experiences of Van's life. A scene was shot once: a few feet of wasted film meant a man's job.

Van Dyke hired Jean Hersholt as star and worked him day and night shooting all the scenes in which his face appeared. Then Van hired a double for chases and scenes in which the star's back was to the camera. Anything to keep down the cost!

"Men of the Desert" and "Barriers Burned Away" were two of the pictures he made during this period. Jobs then became fewer and Van got lost in the rapid turnover.

Had it not been for some golf matches he might have gone hungry. Edgar Kennedy, famous comedian of the Keystone Cop series, cooked up these games. He knew that Van Dyke and he could shoot a darn good score together, so Kennedy would arrange a foursome by getting two other fellows that he knew couldn't shoot as good a game as they. Upon arrival at the golf course, Kennedy and Van would team up, taking on the other fellows at a dollar a hole.

Some time before Woody had written a couple of stage plays which Fred Butler and Charles Nichols had produced in San Francisco, so he decided to turn his hand to scenarios, a last ditch stand: he couldn't get a job in production anywhere. He wrote a few screenplays and tried to sell them but couldn't. Down to his last thirty-five cents, he spent a nickel for a streetcar ride. He had no place in particular to go, but he could always think better when he was moving. Idleness and Van Dyke didn't mix. If he couldn't be active, he was the unhappiest man in the world.

When the trolley stopped at Sunset and Western, Van looked up and saw the Fox Studios. He had submitted the script of "Madonna of the North" to Sol Wurtzel some time back. Thinking he might as well try to peddle it elsewhere, he jumped off the car.

To the girl at the information window, he said, "My name's W. S. Van Dyke and I — "

"Why, Mr. Van Dyke, Mr. Wurtzel's been trying to get in touch with you. Just a minute and I'll tell him you're here."

Woody's heart started to pound. My gosh, a sale?

The girl smiled and said, "Will you go in to Mr. Wurtzel's office, please?"

Sol Wurtzel came right to the point: "How much do you want for the story?"

Woody tried to look nonchalant, at the same time trying to guess how much Wurtzel would pay. All he could think of was his thirty cents so he stammered, "Five hundred?"

"It's a deal," replied Wurtzel.

Van began to think maybe he should have asked five thousand! But if he did, Wurtzel might have called the whole thing off. At any rate, this met his present need — he was satisfied.

It was released under the title, "Sins of the Parents," and gave Gladys Brockwell her first starring role.

Van Dyke's streetcar ride broke the spell.

Chapter 8

JACK DEMPSEY'S "DAREDEVIL JACK"

CHAPTER EIGHT

Jack Dempsey's "Daredevil Jack"

Jack Dempsey had knocked out Jess Willard in July to become the most talked about and exciting fighter in the history of the prize ring. He spelled box office to Fred C. Quimby of Pathe in New York, the foremost producer of serials. Movie making involves risks encountered by few other industries and those who head the business exist primarily through their ability to know what is box office. Dempsey had been signed for "Daredevil Jack" but had to finish the picture in twelve weeks to satisfy a commitment made earlier to appear with a circus in the Fall; the best lots averaged a week and a half per episode. Pathe lacked space and sufficient personnel to put through the champ's contract. Quimby was on the spot.

He called Robert C. Brunton in Hollywood, asking him to produce "Daredevil Jack" for Pathe, supplying Hollywood's best director. Brunton couldn't say "No" to the fabulous offer made.

Brunton called Van Dyke and asked, "Can you do it?"

"In twelve weeks?"

"I'll pay you a $500 bonus for every episode you complete in a week's time."

Gulped Van, "I'll take the job."

Woody Van Dyke didn't realize what he had gulped himself into. He had never directed serials but Dempsey and the $500 bonus sounded good.

Van Dyke was on the spot. That he liked. This was not the first time he had risked his neck for extra money. When he learned how Brunton got the deal from Pathe, it looked even better to him. He organized his crew quickly. Gilson Willets, who wrote the stories on the train, arrived from Pathe's New York studio with the first two episodes completed. The principal members of the supporting cast arrived: Josie (Josephine) Sedgwick, heroine; "Bull" Montana, "Spike" Robinson, Edgar Kennedy, Carl Stockdale and Eddie Hearn. They were quickly briefed and told to report the next morning at six o'clock ready for work. "Six o'clock?" said one member. "What kind of a guy is this Van Dyke?"

Jack Dempsey and Van Dyke met for the first time on the set. Jack told Van he didn't know how to act. Woody said, "Don't. Just do what I say. Don't worry about it, and go to sleep when you go home nights." Dempsey had learned to size up a man quickly in the ring — this fellow Van Dyke was okay. They talked over the idea of the story.

Dempsey, the idol of kids, each week would miraculously save life or property with his daring and two fists.

This was duck soup for Van Dyke. He could think up ideas faster than the writers could turn them out. In the first episode a boy was caught in the middle of a railroad bridge as the limited came thundering down on him. The bridge was over a raging river. It was a case of jump and drown, or be ground to death under the wheels of the speeding train.

Dempsey soon learned that making movies was hard work and required a certain know-how. Klieg had developed carbon lights for indoor shooting — just the thing for Van Dyke, who had been promised a $500 bonus for every episode completed in a week's time. This meant that Dempsey must work from six a.m. till midnight. Klieg lights, large, heavy, and cumbersome to handle, smoked unless the hard carbons were set just right, and were very hot to work under, Dempsey found. He also had to learn how to look into the lights to avoid "Klieg eyes."

The second episode cooked up a dilly of a fight. Nothing like a good old-fashioned brawl in a saloon. Daredevil Jack was not a drinking man and didn't patronize such places, no siree, but he had to, just this once, to defend the honor of the heroine. Van Dyke selected Herschel Mayo, husky rough and tumbler, to be Jack's principal contender in the fight. Mayo, who could play a stinker of the first order, knew how to put on a good show when it came to a rough fight, movie style. Dempsey knew nothing about movie fights. Before shooting the scene, Van Dyke told Jack to make it look good. He did! The brawl got under way. Chairs, tables and bodies sailed through the air. The champ was brushing them off like flies when suddenly his keen eyes saw Mayo lead with a hefty right. A quick sidestep, the blow missed, and like a flash Dempsey let go one that caught poor Mayo squarely on the chin and laid him out cold. Work stopped and the medical staff was summoned to bring him to. After all, a fight was a fight to the champ. Before they continued the scene, Van Dyke showed Dempsey how to hold a punch.

The two men became the closest of friends. Their natures were much alike. Both liked people and exciting things and today, tomorrow or the next day, they were always the same.

After the first three episodes, Woody was in the swing of the thing and knew he had the job licked. But he burned the midnight oil in his room many nights after the cast had gone home, rewriting action scenes for the next day's work. Frequently he would tear up the writer's script, work out his own ideas. But no matter how late he worked, even though bleary-eyed, he was always on stage at 5:30 in the morning. This was tough work. Each day made its demands on the gang. Jump off houses, buck horses, break through doors, fight villains — all part of the day's work. However, Van was always considerate and never asked his cast to do anything he himself would not do. It was not uncommon to arrive on stage at an early hour and see Van Dyke leaping off the top of a house, or crashing through a door. Whatever the scheme he had worked out for the day, he was figuring how it could be done safely.

After six or seven weeks of movie making, Dempsey became convinced that prize fighting was easier. You could just sock a guy and go home, but not in a Van Dyke "arena."

One day Van Dyke was having trouble with close-ups because of his star's slightly deformed nose so he decided to fix it up with putty. Dempsey's nose turned out fine; and the champ looked like a Roman gladiator until, in the next scene, Edgar Kennedy knocked the "putty" across the room. In the shot it looked like the champ's nose was flying through the air. Not to be outdone, Dempsey measured one just right in the following scene, and Kennedy's toupee landed in the rafters.

Van Dyke found himself wondering whether this guy Dempsey was as tough as they said he was. Could he really take it, or had those knockout punches just been lucky? The more he thought about it, the more curious he became. He should have dismissed the suggestion the first time it came to him, but like most people he, too, was curious. From that moment on, every time Van Dyke got close to the champ he had an urge to sock him to see if he could knock him out. But always at the right moment the angel over Van Dyke's shoulder said, "You'd better not," and he didn't. But . . . an unexpected occasion provided the opportunity. Their current episode was one that called for the hero to win enough money in a championship fight to pay off the mortgage on the heroine's farm. As a publicity stunt, the studio had engaged several professional fighters from different countries to spar with Dempsey in scenes at the training camp in the picture.

One day a big Greek heavyweight from Australia got the same urge Van Dyke had had and he was unable to resist it. The more he thought about it, the more he got the urge. "Gee, tink of all de publisty I'd get if I could knock da champ out!" He went to Van Dyke and told him what he would like to do. Van Dyke, amused, asked him how he expected to accomplish such a feat. The Greek smiled and said that in the next sparring scene he could wait until Jack wasn't looking and then give him everything he had. That did it. The *divvil* got the best of Van and he told the Greek to go to it. But, on giving the whole idea a second thought, Van considered what a joke it would be on the Greek to tip off Dempsey. This would kill three birds with one stone. He would find out if Dempsey could take it . . . see a startled Greek as Jack turned on him in earnest . . . but, best of all, get a swell action shot. Van took Dempsey into his confidence and told him what the would-be champ was up to. Jack thought it a great joke. He told Van not to say a word to anyone and to watch what happened.

Boy, oh boy, Van thought, this is really going to be something. He quickly got the cast together for the next sparring scene and, with a twinkle in his eye, gave the cue for action.

A couple of lesser lights were sent into the ring with the champ to warm things up a bit and then Van said, "Okay, now, let's have some real action." He winked at the Greek and motioned him into the ring. The fighters touched gloves but before the Greek had a chance to blink an eye, Dempsey said. "I understand, fella, you'd like to knock me out." The Greek was caught by surprise. So was Van Dyke! He didn't know what his star was up to. Dempsey dropped his arms to his side and said, "Go ahead, fella, let's see if you can do it." There was nothing else the Greek could do but sock, and sock he did. He put everything he could lift into that punch. SMACK!! Right square on Dempsey's chin. It was the Greek's one and only chance and he sure made it good. Van Dyke winced. He closed his eyes because he didn't want to see his champ flat on the mat. But one eye peeked open just in time to see Dempsey catch his balance, shake his head slightly, then uncork a haymaker. They carried the Greek out of the ring on a stretcher.

Van Dyke was convinced, as was everyone else in the company, that Dempsey could take it, and make no mistake about it. No one ever got the urge again. That is, no one but Van Dyke. He still couldn't shake the desire to sock this guy, or at least see him down for the count.

Woody soon got his chance. Many episodes were made in the California desert near Dagget because of the sunshine and natural scenery. On one of these treks Dempsey, not accustomed to the hot California sun, fell asleep on a stack of canvas tarpaulin while waiting for some props to be set. The moment Van Dyke saw the champ "out," he got an idea. That urge was back in a flash. To be able to say that you had hit Dempsey was saying much. Now was the time. There was a quick huddle. Van Dyke and a bunch of cowboys made a rush and before Jack had time to blink his eyes he was hog-tied, hand and foot. He tried to get up but he couldn't budge. Then with the hilarity of a bunch of kids the men danced around their victim like wild Indians, each taking turns socking him with pieces of newspaper, burlap sacks, in fact, anything they could get their hands on. This was the only chance any one of them would ever have to sock the champ and live, and each took full advantage of it.

Dempsey had heard about Van Dyke's jokes. He knew he pulled them only on his friends or those for whom he had high regard. Therefore, instead of being annoyed at the prank, he was glad and took it in stride. In fact, he was somewhat relieved because, not having been the object of one of Woody's gags up to now, he had wondered if he really was one of the gang. Van Dyke called a halt to the "battle royal" as quickly as it started. That urge had been satisfied and he knew now that the champ could take it, and in more ways than one. He cut Dempsey loose. Jack was on his feet in an instant . . . "I walked into that one, all right!" "You sure did," replied Woody with a grin. "Places, everybody!" No retakes even when it came to fun.

The serial was finished in record time, much to the delight of Brunton. Van Dyke collected his bonus every week. Pathe Studio got their serial on schedule and Quimby was out of a tough spot and everybody was satisfied.

Dempsey returned east to fulfill his contract with the circus and to continue his career in the ring. But just before Jack and Van, now close friends, bid one another goodbye, Dempsey gave Woody a "gentle" slap on the back that nearly broke every vertebra in his spine. The champ chuckled and said, "Just a reminder, Van. Never let that urge get the best of you again!"

Van Dyke, now pegged as a serial director of the first order, left Brunton to venture on his own.

Chapter 9

SUCCESS MEETS FAILURE

CHAPTER NINE

Success Meets Failure

In the very presence of this new and successful venture, the Van Dykes were to face failure. Failure of that which they both had wanted most to succeed . . . their marriage. Van and Zina separated.

Woody moved into a small house behind the Charlie Chaplin Studios with Edgar Kennedy and Bert Henderson. Jobs again seemed scarce. It took every trick Edgar Kennedy had in the bag plus a good many golf matches to bridge Van Dyke over this period.

Louis Burston, who had become an important producer in Hollywood, had heard much about Van Dyke as an action man. He sent for him and they made a deal. Van was not too enthusiastic about the job because he had been striving to crack Hollywood's "Inner Circle" which would give him the chance to direct the kind of pictures he wanted to. But little did he know that this association with Burston was eventually to afford him this opportunity.

Woody's first assignment was a serial, "The Hawk's Trail," starring King Baggot and Reah Mitchel. Burston, anxious to see how Van Dyke worked, was on the set frequently during the first picture. He found his new director arriving an hour before the cast every day, rounding up the janitor, watchman and anyone else who happened to be around, walking them through scenes he had planned for the day's work. By the time the cast arrived, every entrance, exit and piece of business had been tried and timed to perfection, and the day's shooting would proceed without a hitch. Van Dyke seldom made a retake, despite the exaggerated pantomime, gestures and much running and walking about. The dialogue was intercut on the film.

Burston discovered that Van Dyke worked faster than anyone he had ever had on his lot, and yet the action, photography and composition was always better. He then assigned Woody to direct his star, David Butler, in "The Milky Way," and "According to Hoyle." Van Dyke and Butler hit it off at once.

As a result of the splendid job done on these two films, Woody got a chance to do the type of picture he had wanted to do for some time. It was a dramatic story of a little orphan girl, "Forget Me Not." Burston was criticized for giving Van this picture. His financial backers thought Van Dyke too rough and tough to catch the sympathy and heart interest of a little child. But Louis Burston was one of the few people who really understood Van Dyke, he was so everlastingly on the move.

Years on the road, as a child in the theatre, meeting youngsters from all walks of life in cities, towns and hamlets the country over had given Van Dyke his understanding. He had known children of poverty as well as those of moderate means. He had visited their homes, played in their streets and fought with them in their backyards and alleys. He had talked with them in their playhouses built in trees, as only kids talk with one another, about a lot of things.

Though callous on the surface, Van Dyke never lost his child's heart. Louis Burston knew this Van, who with his mother had spent many evenings in the Burston home and Mrs. Van Dyke had told him about the time she had found Van, when he was but eighteen, sitting on a log in Ashford, Washington, looking at Mount Rainier. She had noticed him writing something on a piece of paper. After much persuasion she got him to show it to her, a poem entitled "Rebuke." His mother asked what had inspired his poem and her son replied, "I wondered what that mountain would say if it could talk and I imagined I was the mountain and put down on paper what I would say." Van Dyke had been told of an old Indian legend that Mount Rainier was once called "The Mountain That Was God." How could a mountain be God? The last two verses of his poem, "Rebuke," was his challenge to this legend:

"To think ye never knew
The secret of my fame,
I'll lay my soul to view,
That ye may know my name.
Let words with truth be shod
The TRUTH — and damn the odds,
I'm not
'The Mountain That Was God'
I'm

'The Mountain That IS GOD'S!' "

When Louis B. Mayer saw "Forget Me Not" he gave the Burston Studios a contract for eight pictures. Mr. Mayer, one of the most important independent producers in town, headed his own company on the Selig lot, but also bought pictures from other studios.

A contract for eight pictures. This was a big deal and cause for much celebration. Burston was indeed a happy man, as was Van Dyke, and he realized for the first time the varied talents of his new director. There was a sympathetic touch in "Forget Me Not" that only a man with great sensitivity could have attained. The skeptics, however, said it was just an accident that the picture turned out well . . . one of those things, the story was a natural. They wouldn't give Van credit. Van Dyke didn't care. What interested him was the new contract. It meant that he could now do the kind of stories he liked. Having been pegged an action man, he had been "typed" for that kind of film and previously no one would give him a chance to do anything else. The new deal called for a substantial raise for both David Butler and Van Dyke. David Butler was to be featured in each of the films and was to receive $1,000 a week. This was big money, especially with a contract for eight consecutive films. Butler was in San Francisco vacationing after "Forget Me Not" so Burston sent him a wire about the contract and raise, and told him to celebrate . . . have a good time. He did!

The Burstons had purchased a new home in Los Angeles and they planned to celebrate too. The employees who had been a part of the Burston organization since its inception were invited to take part. Marco Hellman, financial backer of Burston Films, among other prominent Southern Californians, was on the guest list. The day of the big affair arrived. Mrs. Burston and the children had never been so excited. In the afternoon Mr. Burston decided to look at some horses. Horses were his hobby, and this was his big day, so he thought he would take time off and do some scouting around. A friend, an expert on show horses, was in town for the party, so he took him along. They got into Burston's big Packard sedan and drove to Pomona.

Van Dyke got out his best bib and tucker for the party.

This was to be his big night, too. Louis B. Mayer and many other outstanding men in the industry would be there.

But in the late afternoon, Van Dyke received a phone call to get to the Burston home as quickly as possible. Upon entering the house he was greeted by a friend of the family who informed him that Louis Burston had been killed in an automobile accident. On leaving Pomona to return home, Burston's car had been hit by a train at Phillips Crossing, instantly killing all of the occupants. The guests were told as they arrived for the party.

David Butler was shocked when he picked up the San Francisco newspaper the next morning and read, "Burston, Movie Producer, Killed." Van Dyke telephoned him that their contract had been canceled. Marco Hellman had withdrawn his financial support from the studio because Burston would not be there to supervise production. Butler had been the only one to celebrate and he told Van Dyke he would never again party until he had the contract in his hand.

Chapter 10

THE OKLAHOMA OUTLAWS

CHAPTER TEN

The Oklahoma Outlaws

Christie Comedies purchased the Burston Studios and Van Dyke was on his own. He signed a contract to do a picture for an independent producer in Burlingame, California. It was a sea story called "Half a Dollar Bill," and featured Marie Doro and Raymond Hatton. The entire film was made aboard a ship in San Francisco Bay . . . one set, one camera. Van found himself again in the "One-take, no-money-unless-the-film-gets-on-the-screen" class.

"Half A Dollar Bill" put Van Dyke back in action melodrama. He directed a couple of Charlie Hutchinson bandit serials and then got a call to do a two-fisted, gun-totin' super duper story, "Lady of the Dugout," featuring Frank and Al Jennings, the Oklahoma outlaws, in person. Many colorful and interesting stories had been told about these two men. Newspaper articles, dime novels and stories galore had been written about the Jennings brothers. Van Dyke had read them all. He had heard how they became outlaws to avenge the murder of a brother. Their sensational record as train robbers and bank bandits for four years rivaled the daring of the west's most famous "Two-gun" men. Al Jennings' sentence had been commuted by President McKinley in 1902 on recommendation of Senator Mark Hanna and in 1907 President Theodore Roosevelt gave him free and full pardon.

Van Dyke's love of adventure, his lust for excitement, plus the opportunity to meet two famous real train robbers, brought a quick "Yes," when Al Jennings had asked him if he would be interested in the assignment.

Al Jennings had done one picture for Thanhouser in New Rochelle called "Beating Back." This film was the story of his life after his pardon and his rise back in society to a run-off in the nomination for Governor of the State of Oklahoma. The audience response was great, so he decided to do a picture based on incidents in his life when he and his brother, Frank, were train robbers and bank bandits. He had told George Seigman, D. W. Griffith's right hand man, about the idea and Seigman thought it excellent, but Al couldn't afford the price of a top-flight director. Seigman told him about Van Dyke . . . that he was young but up and coming and sure to reach the top as a director. He thought Van Dyke would do the job for about three hundred a week if Al could afford to pay that much. Van Dyke had agreed, and the deal was closed.

Al Jennings promoted the financial backing for the picture from a banker friend. The script consisted of notes on a piece of paper which Jennings wrote from Woody's ideas. Al Jennings wrote the titles, was business manager, producer and star with his brother, Frank. Corene Grant, Benny Alexander, an English actor named Joe Singleton, and Carl Stockdale were the featured players.

"Lady of the Dugout" was quite a story. There were three important sequences in the picture . . . one, a veranda of a large resort hotel . . . another, a bank hold-up . . . and the main part of the story — the secluded hideout of the Jennings boys, a dugout somewhere across the Oklahoma border in Texas. Woody photographed the hotel scene on the porch of the famous Hollywood Hotel on the corner of Hollywood Blvd. and Highland Ave., to eliminate the cost of a set. This gave the film prestige, as well as a very impressive opening. The bank hold-up was staged in the town of Tehachapi, California. Van rented the main street, the bank and the entire population for a consideration and some publicity, thus eliminating the cost of another set. The company then moved into the desert for the dugout stuff. There was plenty of room in the wide open spaces and they could set up their dugout anywhere.

The trend in movies at the time was drama and pathos, so Van Dyke played it to the hilt.

He opened the desert scene with the bandits, grim, tired and dirty, arriving at their hideout after an all-night ride, only to find it occupied by a little boy and his mother. Visibly weak from lack of food, the Lady of the Dugout pleaded for mercy for herself and child.

"Cut," said Van. The scene was fine. "Now where do we go from here?" Al Jennings handed him the title for the next scene: "Maybe there was much that was bad in these two men, but there was a little that was good, too." Woody pondered it for a moment and then worked out a scene to fit the title. He brought out that "little that was good" by having Al, the bandit, ride fifteen miles to the nearest habitation for food, even though jeopardizing his own safety.

After this shot was made, Woody dreamed up another very touching scene. "Now, we'll have Al come back with the bacon and there, inside the dugout, will be his brother Frank, the most feared killer in the west, with the little child sound asleep in his arms." Everybody thought it a great idea, so they made the shot. Al entered the dugout with the bacon . . . brother Frank put his finger to his lips and whispered, "Shhhh." Then, to make the scene a real tear-jerker, Woody shot a close-up. The little boy awakened and patted the "nice man's" bearded face. Tears came to the other bandit's eyes, and Van yelled "Cut" and the scene faded there.

Then the plot thickened. The next shot called for the bandits to return to the dugout the following day and discover a stranger there. The lady explains he is her husband who had been looking for food the day before. Frank and Al send him to town for more bacon but the man double-crosses them and brings back the marshal. Van Dyke made the marshal scene tense. Frank and Al are down in the dugout as the marshal and traitor approach under cover of darkness. "What's this?" As sensitive as coyotes, the Oklahoma outlaws knew that horses were approaching in the distance. Something had gone afoul! They were out of the dugout in a flash and disappeared in the dark of the night.

After getting the boys out of that scrape, Woody got rid of the marshal by having the Lady of the Dugout point in the opposite direction, "They went that-a-way."

The next scene was not nice. Frank and Al had to shoot the man who had betrayed them. It was a hard thing to do because the little boy and the Lady of the Dugout were their friends, but that rat couldn't be trusted. They carried the body of the dead man down to the bed in the dugout. That finished the desert stuff so the company packed up and went back to Hollywood.

But Al Jennings ran out of money again. He tried to promote some more finances from his banker friend (this was the third time) but it didn't work. The banker had put up all the money he was going to. Van Dyke and Jennings pleaded that the entire picture was on film except one last dramatic bit, but the banker said "No!" Van remembered the old Essanay building in Culver City. It wasn't occupied; so, having no money to rent studio space, he moved the cast, scenery and props over there and set up the bed.

The one remaining shot was a touching one and called for the lady, the boy and the dead man. It was a pathetic bit that was to follow the last scene made on the desert where Frank and Al had just put the body of the dead man on the bed. The boy was to come into the room and try to waken his father by shaking him. After several attempts, the child was to look up at his mother and say, "Mommy, why does Daddy lie so still?"

Van was ready to make the shot that would finish the picture when he discovered his "dead man" was gone. Al said, "He's probably down at Joe's place with Frank." Woody disgustedly said, "Come on, let's go get 'em." Sure enough, Frank and the Englishman were there all right, but Van Dyke's actor was out like a light — dead drunk. Woody's first impulse was to kick him in the pants, but just as he raised his boot, he looked at Al . . . "Wait a minute! The guy in the scene's supposed to be dead." Woody smiled, " . . . and he'll never look deader." They poured him into a wheelbarrow and wheeled him over to the set. Dumping him on the bed, Van said, "Roll 'em!" And the cameraman started to grind. That Englishman never gave a better performance. The little boy shook him and shook him and shook him, but he wouldn't wake up. Woody gave the child the cue, "Look up, now, and speak." He did! He looked up and said, "Mommy, why does Daddy smell so bad?" Of course, the title on the screen, "Mommy, why does Daddy lie so still?" saved the scene and the shot was used.

"Lady of the Dugout" was quite a picture but financing six-reelers was too much for Jennings so he went back to producing two-reelers. Van Dyke had taken a great fancy to Al, but directing shorts wasn't his line.

Robert Brunton, who had given Van Dyke the Jack Dempsey assignment, sent for him to direct Ruth Roland.

Chapter 11

RUTH ROLAND OUT-PERILS "PAULINE"

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Ruth Roland Out-Perils "Pauline"

Ruth Roland's contract had been acquired by Robert Brunton and he wasted no time in making a deal with Van Dyke to direct — but no $500 a week bonuses this time.

During this era Ruth Roland and Pearl White were the champions of the serial box office, and their competition was keen. Either Ruth outperiled the perils of "Pauline" Pearl White, or Pearl White outperiled the perils of Ruth Roland. Van Dyke's job each week was to try and out-do the "Queen."

Serial directors were judged by their ability to think up wild ideas and thrilling climaxes for each weekly chapter: — Automobile and train races to crossings; leaps from one plane to another without parachute; chases up and down steep mountain grades with cars skidding around hairpin curves; auto crashes . . . head-on, broadside, roll 'em over, down embankments, into rivers, through houses . . . anything for excitement.

Woody's first move was to surround himself with the best serial men in the business. He never took unnecessary chances and always hired those who had proved themselves in past performance. Among the latter was Bob Rose, professional stunt man, to whom Van Dyke gave the job of substituting for Ruth Roland in some scenes when she requested a double.

Studio writers provided the stories but Van rewrote them all as he went along. He always cooked up his own ideas for the climaxes and Ruth and Rose were at his elbow whenever preparing these, to be sure they could do the stunts.

One episode called for an automobile-train race to a crossing. Van Dyke and Rose were looking over the script . . . "shot of Ruth's car racing down a road paralleling the railroad tracks with a villain's car in hot pursuit. Then a flash to a train whistling in the distance. Now cut to Ruth driving like mad. Now a shot of the train roaring at mile-a-minute speed. Then to the crossing a few miles down the track. Can our heroine beat the train, or will she be forced to stop and be at the mercy of the villain in pursuit? She can't stop, not Ruthie. She must take the chance. Grasping the wheel firmly in hand, she pushes the gasoline throttle wide open. Now it's a race for life or death! The train whistle is screeching full blast. They're neck and neck. Cut to Ruth. Now to the train . . then to the crossing . . . and just as they meet, — 'SEE THE NEXT CHAPTER NEXT WEEK'."

"That sounds all right, Rose. Now let's put it on film." Van Dyke and his stunt man got in Ruth's automobile and paced the train several times at exactly thirty-five miles per hour to be sure the engineer could maintain a steady speed. They then made a few trial runs. The speed of the automobile was increased just enough to cut sharply in front of the train as they both reached the crossing. The punch of the shot depended on how close the train came to hitting the car. When Van Dyke was certain that everyone knew exactly what to do, he took a position with the cameraman at the railroad crossing and gave the cue for action. Bob Rose in the automobile, doubling for Ruth Roland, and the train came.

Rose was making it too good. Had he misjudged his timing? Neck and neck!! They approached the crossing. "They're going to crash!" somebody yelled. And yeow-ee! Rose kicked the throttle wide open. The car leaped ahead, skidding across the track just as the cylinder head of the engine grazed the rear end of the machine. "That's it," cried Van Dyke as he snapped his fingers and yelled, "Cut!"

This was rough and tough business and one not to mess around with unless you knew what you were doing . . . Indian fights, knife fights, horses jumping off cliffs galloping at full speed . . . swimming rapids . . . shooting falls, and numerous other "playful" stunts. Woody's gang was good for anything. The stories cooked up for Ruth Roland included "The Red Circle," "The Timber Queen," "The Lost Valley" and "The Avenging Arrow." There was never a dull moment on this series. Ruth was a hard worker and liked Van Dyke because he finished a serial in less time than most other directors. Woody maintained the same schedule he had started with Dempsey — even though minus the bonus this time. He kept them all busy trying to bring to life the stuff he would dream up for his star. And few imaginations could out-do Van Dyke's.

One of his outstanding concoctions was a cannibal story that called for Ruth to escape certain death by a harrowing jump into the raging sea. The company set up headquarters at Balboa, California for this episode. A large rock formation in the Pacific Ocean between Balboa and Laguna Beach had been selected for the scene of action. The rock was approximately a hundred feet from the shore and ideal for the climax. The construction gang built a grass hut on the rock and placed a tall telephone pole directly in the center of the hut. A "Crow's nest" or lookout basket was placed at the top of the pole and the set was complete. It was all to represent a lookout post on a cannibal-infested tropical island.

The selected location was ideal. A fifty-foot cliff cut off the view of the back country. At low tide there was only a foot of water in the lagoon between the rock and the shore. When there were heavy ground swells the surge of the sea would fill the lagoon with several feet of water and make it almost impossible to reach the rock without being swept out to sea. This was what Van Dyke wanted . . . and, too, the scene provided an effective camera shot when the huge waves crashed against the rock and sent a spray of foaming white water fifteen to twenty-five feet in the air. As in all Ruth Roland episodes, there was a chase. This one was a Van Dyke special. In the preceding chapter the heroine had miraculously escaped a bunch of head-hunting wild men, and just as everyone thought her safe, she was suddenly trapped — cut off from all means of escape by the raging sea. Certainly this would be the last of Ruth Roland! She couldn't possibly surmount this one. But Van Dyke had another chapter to get out the following week so he conceived this idea of the grass hut on the rock.

After waiting a whole week wondering what Ruth would do, hundreds of kids in the Bijou Theatre yelled with glee as their heroine spied the grass hut a hundred feet out to sea. Van Dyke was also in the theatre. He enjoyed watching the youngsters' reaction to Ruth's escapades. He laughed louder than the kids screamed. Ruth started across the shallow lagoon but the kids' hearts sank as a big wave came roaring in from the sea. "Look out!" they screamed and Ruth scrambled back up on the beach just in time. No, she could never make it across the lagoon to the big rock between waves. What could she do? Suddenly Ruth heard the cries of the cannibals in the distance. They had picked up her trail. Ruth must reach that rock. She tried again. Look out!! . . . and it was just in the nick of time. The now desperate heroine crawled back up on the beach, breathing heavily and completely exhausted. Oh, so exhausted. She lay motionless on the beach as the foam from the sea licked the soles of her boots. The kids in the theatre were screaming for Ruth to get up and do something. The cannibals were closing in. In a final desperate effort Ruth got to her feet. Mustering every ounce of strength she fought her way through the sea, reaching the rock just in time. The wild men came pouring down on the beach. Ruth climbed to safety. The wind blew harder. The sea got rougher. Spying their victim and the grass hut on the rock, two silly fellows were "swept out to sea" trying to reach her. Safe for the moment at least, Ruth climbed the pole in the center of the hut to the lookout basket on top. Surely she could signal for help from up there. But Van Dyke didn't let his cannibals tolerate a condition like that. No, siree! Not real, ferocious, headhunting cannibals. So he devised a clever solution to the problem and that Chief cannibal did an awful dirty trick. That stinker Van Dyke had him wind a bunch of dry grass around an arrow, set it on fire, and then shoot the flaming torch smack-dab into Ruthie's grass hut. That did it! The other cannibals jumped up and down with glee as the hut quickly burst into flames. Our poor heroine was trapped again. She'd never escape this time! Why, that rock was thirty feet wide. She couldn't jump off the pole into the ocean because she couldn't clear the rock. She couldn't climb down the pole, the hut was on fire. But Ruth would have to figure it out because there was another chapter next week! The wind blew harder. Huge waves crashed against the rock. The hut was now a roaring inferno. The pole started to sway back and forth! Ruth grabbed the edge of the basket and peered over the side. The pole was burning in two.

Horrified, she clutched her head in her hands and screamed. What could she do now? The pole dizzily swayed back and forth. The cannibals on the beach leaped and danced crazily. The kids in the theatre thought, gee, if the pole will only fall toward the ocean, she can jump into deep water and swim. But c-r-a-c-k, it snapped in two and came tumbling toward the beach. Ruth leaped into the air and came hurtling down toward the sharp rocks in the shallow lagoon. Just as it looked like certain death, a huge wave came crashing in from the sea and she disappeared in the swirling foam. . . .

"SEE THE NEXT EPISODE NEXT WEEK."

"Jeepers," said the kids as they left the theatre. They didn't know that Van Dyke had more fun than any of them when he made that scene. Much more fun than Bob Rose, who was doubling for Ruth on top of the pole. The pole idea was great but his stunt man almost got killed in photographing the scene. Anticipating that the pole might catch fire and cause trouble Van Dyke had rigged a long piano wire to the top of it in such a way that if the fire got too hot, Rose could pull the wire, trip the pole, and be certain it would fall seaward so he could clear the rock and leap safely into deep water.

What really happened in the making of this shot was actually more exciting than the action the kids had seen in the theatre.

When the cannibals spied Ruth on the beach, Van Dyke had given Bob Rose the cue to double for Ruth. It was Rose who had fought his way through the surf to the rock and safety and then had climbed to the top of the pole. The shot had gone just as Woody planned it. The weather was fine. A combination of big ground swells and a fresh breeze made an effective and heavy running sea. This was all good. Then the flaming arrow that had started the fire creeping up the pole. It was getting too hot so Van Dyke gave Rose the signal for the breakaway and leap. The stunt man gave a mighty pull but the wire broke and the pole didn't fall. Van, not knowing what happened, figured that Rose, as usual, was just making the scene look good.

The wind increased and threatened to send Rose, crow's nest and all, toppling over on the beach. Van Dyke thought Rose was carrying the act too far and started waving his arms and yelling to him to stop rocking the pole. He was using a megaphone but because of the noise of wind and sea, Rose couldn't hear what he was saying nor did Van Dyke know that Rose was trying to tell him the wire had broken and he was endeavoring to make the pole fall towards the sea and deep water.

Woody became frantic as he saw his champion stunt man, eighty-five feet in the air, continue to sway the pole back and forth. What was this fool trying to do? Then it happened. C-r-a-c-k! The pole snapped and Rose, lookout basket and all, fell toward the beach. The camera kept grinding. Van Dyke stood stiff as Rose did the only thing left to do — jump . . . as pretty a leap as was ever filmed . . . but on his way down all Rose could think about were the jagged rocks. And then, as if by some magic, King Neptune came to the rescue and provided an original finish that Van Dyke hadn't written into the script. An enormous wave roared in from the sea, filling the lagoon with a swirl of water just as Rose hit, kir-splash!

That experience had caused both Van Dyke and Bob Rose several breathless moments. But the kids in the theatre yelled their heads off and thought it was great — the best they'd seen yet.

Forever after, one of Van Dyke's favorite stories was a descriptive interpretation of a boy he saw backing up the aisle of the theatre in the middle of this episode. The little fellow apparently had to go to the "Men's Room" but just couldn't leave the picture long enough. He backed slowly up the aisle, tightly criss-crossing his legs, intently watching the picture until the scene was finished and then made a beeline for the door. Van Dyke said, "When you can hold your audience like that, you've really got 'em!"

Chapter 12

DISGUSTED WITH HOLLYWOOD

CHAPTER TWELVE

Disgusted With Hollywood

The "Inner Circle" of Hollywood isn't cracked directing serials and Westerns. Van Dyke had found that out. After four Ruth Rolands for Brunton he tried to get another type of assignment but wound up with a serial for Hal Roach in Culver City. There was more shifting around and then an action drama for Thomas H. Ince on the Selig lot, followed by another super thriller, "Bar Harbor," starring Monte Blue, at Warner Brothers Studios in Burbank, California. Then, again, the unhappy experience of being pushed around as a result of having been typed as a good serial and Western director. He saw now that once branded as a Western director in Hollywood you weren't given a chance to try anything else. He saw, too, how easy it would be for him, as a director, to do the same thing and "type" an actor simply because he could do one thing well. He resolved then and there never to make that mistake.

Disgusted with Hollywood and not knowing which way to turn, he decided to take a ride and talk it out with himself. This time he caught a bus. He jumped on the first one that came along. As he paid his fare he asked the driver, "Where does this bus go?"

"To Hollywood," was the reply.

Van laughed to himself . . . "Hollywood." It just wasn't in him to get on a bus heading in any other direction . . . he seemed to gravitate naturally toward the place.

The prestige and sophistication of the "Who's Who" column in Hollywood didn't mean two whoops to Van Dyke, but he knew now that if you weren't in its "Inner Circle" you didn't count. He realized as never before that he must become one of that select group or never have the opportunity to do the kind of pictures he wanted to do. But, to get into that circle was not going to be easy for Van Dyke, because if ever any one man followed his own road and dared to say "No!" he did. If the stories about Hollywood's upper crust were true, he'd never crack it. Why he would starve before he'd "yes" anybody or do anything he didn't think was right just to keep a job or get a break.

As the bus stopped his attention was attracted to an old poster on a fence. It was faded, torn and dirty. Only those lines across the top could still be read: "Louis Burston Presents." Woody sat erect for a moment as he thought about the time he worked for Burston and the terrible tragedy of his friend's sudden death. He recalled "Forget Me Not," and the contract for eight pictures to be released through Louis B. Mayer. Louis B. Mayer? That gave him an idea. Why, sure. If Mr. Mayer had given Burston a contract for eight pictures on the strength of "Forget Me Not" he'd certainly give the man who directed the picture a chance. But that thought cooled off as quickly as it had come. If Mr. Mayer had been interested in him as a director he would have sent for him at the time. Probably, like Marco Hellman, he figured that without Burston no one could do the job. Van Dyke looked up just as the bus passed through the intersection where Hollywood and Sunset Boulevards meet. A passenger explained to his lady friend, "That's called Griffith's

Follies," pointing to the location of the old "Intolerance" set. "Griffith's Follies?" . . . Van chuckled. How typical of this town. But the thought of D. W. Griffith brought to his mind . . . "Do what you're happiest doing, for that's the thing you can do best." How can you do what you can do best if you're not given a chance? Politics, that's what it is. He knew that some people got by that way but all he wanted was an opportunity — an opportunity to do good stories, important stories, to project the reality of life into these films. He was a firm believer that if a man knew his work, and did it well, he wouldn't need politics.

W. S. Van Dyke was not an egotist by any manner of reasoning. He had worked hard for the knowledge he had gained of movie making, and darned hard at that. Long hours, day and night, seven days a week most of the time. He didn't relish the idea of any weak-livered "so and so" telling him how a picture should be done just because he was somebody's "in-law." Nor did he countenance that other brand of coyote, the one whose political influence brought him into the "Inner Circle" because of his "heaps" of money. "That be damned," Van thought. "The box office is the real judge and if you can crack that, you can't be kept out." But convincing Hollywood that this is so was another thing.

Woody looked up and saw the Fox Studios down the street. He recalled the time he'd gotten off the street car and walked right into a story sale. That story wasn't a Western, either . . . and it was good enough for them to use as a starring vehicle for Gladys Brockwell! He perked up — this gave him an idea. He jumped off the bus at the next stop and for the second time, made a beeline for Sol Wurtzel's office. It was late in the afternoon, and certainly no time to barge in on a busy man without an appointment, but Van Dyke hadn't looked at his watch. He'd had a hunch. That was the important thing. He felt sure Wurtzel would give him his chance.

The girl at the information desk asked if he had an appointment. Van said "No," and the girl replied, "I'm sorry, but you'll have to make an appointment as Mr. Wurtzel sees no one otherwise." Van Dyke poked his head inside the window and said, "You tell Mr. Wurtzel I want to see him — and right now!" The startled young lady called Mr. Wurtzel's office . . . with a surprised look she turned to Van and said, "Mr. Wurtzel will see you right away."

Sol Wurtzel greeted him with "Sit down, Van Dyke." Woody wasted no time in telling him what he wanted to do. Sol listened intently and said, "Well, I'll tell you what I'll do. We've got a cowboy star under contract but can't get the right kind of story for him. You do a picture with him and then we'll talk over your proposition." This was the second time Wurtzel caught Van Dyke off guard. Woody never dreamed of doing a Western on this lot. He was thinking fast. It seemed every time he met this man Wurtzel he had to think fast. Van came back with "Just one picture?" Sol Wurtzel replied, "Well — maybe a couple, you know — just enough to get him going." A deal was made and despite Van Dyke's heroic efforts, he again found himself up to his neck in saddles, spurs, six-shooters and all. "When do I start?"

"Now," was the answer as Wurtzel handed him a script. "Take this over to Buck Jones' house and see what you two can do with it."

Chapter 13

BUCK JONES

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Buck Jones

The minute Van Dyke saw Buck Jones he got an idea. Woody quickly recognized that the unusual features of this handsome cowboy had the possibilities of a western Francis X. Bushman. This could be a new twist in Westerns — he could play down the hackneyed hell fire and brimstone angle in the story and devise a more legitimate role.

Woody again surrounded himself with many of his old gang. Lesley Selander was made assistant and a well-knit organization was soon working like the devil in preparation for the first picture. But the work was not laborious. This was important on a Van Dyke unit — when a job became labor, there was something wrong, Van Dyke contended. The director's freedom and casual manner of working impressed Buck Jones.

A twenty-six day shooting schedule was set up for the picture and a new Buck Jones feature was under way. There was no fuss or confusion. Van didn't strive for a scene, he just seemed to know what he wanted, told the cast what to do, and they did it. Buck Jones liked this. He was amazed how smoothly everything was going and how fast they were shooting.

Van Dyke rushed through the picture in nine days, thinking he would impress the front office by saving them so much money. He impressed them all right! Nine thousand kinds of hell broke loose on the lot. He had upset the working schedule of every department head in the whole studio because equipment, props, set construction, film developing, printing, et cetera, was geared to an over-all production schedule. That didn't bother Van. He had made money for Sol. But Woody was told to stick to the schedule he was given.

Buck Jones got a big kick out of Van's being called down for working so fast. He liked the dynamic attitude of this director and asked for him to do all of his pictures. Van agreed because through Buck Jones he could establish a new trend in Westerns.

Star and director were soon hitting it off like a couple of old cronies. "This guy made shooting movies a pleasure," Buck Jones would say. "No false airs, no phony retakes . . . and sophistication? huh-uh!"

The first day on location Van Dyke eliminated any highbrow there might have been in the company. Portable commissaries were used on location jaunts and the food supplied by chuck wagon. The mess hall was a tent. A table made of planks and sawhorses stood in the center. The table was of the kind that if those seated at one end got up at the same time, those seated at the other end would crash to the ground . . . like a teeter-board. Lunch was being served. Van Dyke and a selected group were seated at one end of the table — Buck Jones and his new leading lady at the other. Les Selander was on the side near the center. Luncheon was well under way when Selander said, "Pass the baloney!" Woody and everyone at his end of the table jumped up and Buck Jones and his leading lady bit the dust. There was a roar of laughter and no one was given a chance to get mad.

From that time on "Pass the baloney" was the official initiation cue for all leading ladies when on location.

Van Dyke wasn't a practical joker. He did have a terrific sense of humor and liked his fun all right, but most of the time these pranks were done to break the boredom of a movie set. The long delays could quickly play down the spirit of a company and take the edge off the spontaneity of a scene. Woody's jokes and goofy little gags kept everybody on his toes as one never knew when or on whom the next one might be pulled. Van Dyke had learned early in the movies the disastrous results of being camera conscious. To overcome this he would frequently pull a gag right in the middle of a scene to get a natural reaction and the element of surprise he was after. He knew that to catch a person off-guard resulted in a spontaneity of action that was difficult to obtain any other way.

Jones and Van Dyke spent much time figuring out new stunts. It was customary to change leading ladies frequently because the studio didn't want to build up competition to their Western hero. Each new leading lady was always initiated into the ranks. A favorite gag of Buck's was to fire both guns and fake an accident while practising quick draws. He would break a capsule of imitation blood over the front of his shirt and then fall into his leading lady's arms. One in particular really got special attention from both star and director . . . not because she was high-hat, but because she asked so many questions. Van Dyke always made certain that the recipients of the fun were the right sort. He figured if they weren't, the prank would only serve to make them more difficult to handle. This young lady was Jane Peters, who later changed her name to Carole Lombard. She was an inquisitive, happy-go-lucky kid. She wanted to know everything; every move that was made she asked "Why?" This had gone on for some time when Buck and Van Dyke decided here was a perfect "stooge" for a nice, juicy act.

They were on location at the old Calico Mines near Barstow on the Mojave Desert. During lunch, after Van had left, the conversation "happened" to switch to Van Dyke — how he wouldn't give an inch to any star who pulled any "temperament" stuff on him. Let anyone keep him waiting on a set when a whole company had been called for work and he'd give him a piece of his mind they'd never forget. This made quite an impression on Jane. The next day everyone reported for work at seven o'clock sharp — everyone except the star, Buck Jones. Surely, Jane thought, he'd be there in a minute, especially after that conversation at lunch yesterday. They waited five minutes . . . ten . . . twenty-five. By now, Van Dyke was really peeved. Jane stood there, holding her horse. Surely he'd be there in a minute. Pacing back and forth in front of Jane, Van jerked out his six-shooter and fired at a tin can about fifteen feet away. It flew into the air. Her horse jumped, jerking the reins out of her hands. She grabbed them quickly. She was as much impressed at the marksmanship of her new director as at the terrific power of those Western six-shooters. Another twenty minutes and Van Dyke became a raging maniac. Bang! another tin can bit the dust. Everybody was running around trying to locate the star. Jane Peters, now very much disturbed, tightened her grip on the reins of her horse. At eight o'clock Buck and his wife, Del Jones, together with his driver drove up as unconcerned as you please. Del Jones and the driver walked up the hillside to a big rock where they could watch the company work and Buck lazily strolled onto the set. Van Dyke was standing in front of Miss Peters waiting for Buck. When he got close enough, he lit into him with a verbal lashing the like of which no one present had ever heard before. Buck, highly insulted, told him to shut up or he'd slap his teeth out. That was too much. No star was going to talk to Van Dyke like that and get away with it — especially after keeping the entire company waiting for an hour. Van made a haymaker swing. Jones ducked and caught Van squarely on the chin, sending him head over heels backwards in a cloud of dust. Woody jumped to his feet, pulled out his six-shooter, and bang, Bang, Bang, BANG!! . . . four of the loudest shots ever fired on a Buck Jones set. The cast stood speechless, frozen in their tracks. The driver, sitting with Mrs. Jones on the rock leaped into the air as he yelled "My God!" Mrs. Jones didn't move. Buck, holding his stomach, with an anguished expression, doubled up and from under his hand "blood" oozed. He fell to the ground, calling to the petrified Jane Peters to get him some water. Like a shot, Jane started for the river but was pulled up short by her horse. She hadn't let loose of the reins. Now completely beside herself, she put the reins on the ground, placed her hat on them to keep the horse from running away, grabbed a bucket and dashed madly for the river. Returning, out of breath, Jane found both Van Dyke and Jones doubled up — but with laughter. She stopped in her tracks. They told her she'd been the best audience they'd ever had. "Why, you horrible . . . you, you . . . OH!!!" and bucket and water flew through the air. Both Van and Buck were drenched.

Van had carefully loaded two real bullets in his gun to hit the tin cans but the other four shells were blanks. Even at that, he took caution to fire wide. From Jane Peters' angle, it looked as though he had aimed directly at Buck, and anyway it all happened so fast she wouldn't have noticed whether he aimed wide or not. All she heard was four shots, saw Buck drop and call for water, the "blood" and that was enough. Buck had let his wife in on the gag but not his driver.

Jane Peters was now a veteran in more ways than one.

Even though he enjoyed directing the Buck Jones pictures, Wood hadn't forgotten why he originally came to this lot. Convinced that he had fulfilled his part of the bargain and had Buck Jones well on his way, he went to Wurtzel to ask for that "other" assignment. But Jones was making the studio too much money and Sol said, "Well, I'll tell you — make a few more."

Woody did, but soon decided he wanted to step out of the Western class. They had no other pictures for him to direct so he quit.

Buck was fond of Van, and grateful too, for he was receiving $500 a week when Van Dyke took over, and $3,000 a week when he left. Woody knew that his leaving wouldn't affect the situation for Jones was now well established and would prosper no matter who directed him. Buck tried to talk Van Dyke into remaining but Woody told him he was back in that branded class again and all of the persuasion in the world couldn't change his mind this time — not even his best friend.

"No more Westerns or serials for me!"

Chapter 14

A PANIC AT UNIVERSAL

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

A Panic At Universal

Carl Laemmle of Universal Studios in Burbank, California, sent for Van Dyke to direct a feature picture, "Chicago Fire." Woody accepted the assignment because it was not a Western or serial. When he got into the story, he found it called for action plus, which was why he had been called in to direct.

"A glorified serial!! Umph! They want action? They'll get it!"

After O'Leary's cow kicked over the lantern, "Chicago" was a raging inferno.

To punch up the dramatic value of the big fire scene, Woody was shooting a crowd of merrymakers in a saloon, singing and dancing, unaware of the approaching tragedy.

Somebody smelled smoke. The music and laughter came to an abrupt halt. A peculiar roaring noise was heard in the distance. Suddenly the front door burst open as a man madly dashed in, crying, "Run for your lives! Chicago's on fire!"

"Panic!" cried Van Dyke. "It's a panic! Register panic . . . terror . . . fright!!"

Windows burst as though from the heat of the approaching fire and the place was soon in shambles, but Woody screamed "Cut!"

"That's not what I want," he explained to the cast. "The action was great but you don't look frightened. I want you scared stiff. This is a panic — look the part! Make it show in your faces!!"

He tried again and again but couldn't get what he wanted. While glass windows, doors, furniture and props were being replaced, Van Dyke went into a huddle with his staff. Some actors who played movie tough guys were called into the "conference." They were given instructions and the scene soon again got under way.

The action had no more than started when a terrible fight broke out among a few members of the company. This wasn't in the script, thought some members of the cast.

Like a well-planned football play, Woody gave the cue to his assistant who ran to the telephone and yelled, "Help! Police! There's a riot on Van Dyke's stage!"

The frightened operator put a flash call through to the Hollywood Police Station and a riot squad was dispatched on the double. The police cars, sirens screaming, swerved through the studio gates to the stage. Windows and doors were smashed in by the police. Panic really broke loose. This wasn't in the script. With a satisfied smile, Van Dyke shouted, "Roll 'em!" The cameras had been set, waiting for Van's cue. He got what he was after.

Van Dyke left Universal right after that picture was finished. He said it was because he didn't like the story. But Carl Laemmle may have had something to do with his leaving — it took Laemmle quite some time to straighten out the mess with the police when they learned the truth about the call.

Chapter 15

FIRST JOB AT METRO-GOLDWYN-MAYER

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

First Job At Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

Two pearl-handled Western six-shooters, a couple of lariats, and a regulation Army rifle, which hung on the walls, gave some indication of the man who lived in this modest little bachelor apartment.

Napoleon, Van Dyke's colored houseboy, and Damn, Woody's big police dog, were groomed as neatly as everything else in the place. Each room was the picture of a well-regulated life . . . socks, shoes, ties, dishes, tables, chairs . . . everything spick and span, in its place, as though prepared for a captain's Saturday morning inspection. It always looked like that.

Napoleon and Damn were waiting to hear from their master. The telephone rang and there was a mad scramble as both dog and houseboy raced into the front room.

"Mistah Van Dyke's resdunce. No, suh, he's not heah. Yes, *suh!* Ah's sure will. Yes, *suh!* Da minute he gits heah!"

A garage door slammed shut and there was a race to the kitchen to meet the master of the house. Napoleon, Damn and Van Dyke met on the back steps.

"Mistah Louis B. Mayah wants you all to come to the studio right now."

The garage door banged open. A big black roadster shot out. Damn, barking, had his head out one side; Van Dyke had his out the other; and Napoleon, sitting in the rumble seat, held on as the car zoomed backwards down the driveway. A quick stop. One mighty spin of the wheel and tires burned as they took off for Culver City. Van Dyke was thinking as fast as he was driving. Many changes had taken place in Hollywood since Mr. Mayer had given Burston that contract for eight pictures. Outstanding among these had been the formation of Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

That was where Van Dyke was heading. He knew all about how Mr. Mayer had negotiated that deal . . . merging the Metropolitan Studio, Sam Goldwyn's resources, and those of his own company into this great producing organization in order to meet the demands of an ever-increasing market. M-G-M was the talk of the town. It was the apex of the Hollywood "Inner Circle" . . . only the best pictures . . . great names . . . great stories . . . great casts. At last, a chance to do better things! The running boards of Woody Van Dyke's roadster dipped sand rounding the corners to get to M-G-M. He told the girl at the information window that Mr. Mayer had sent for him. She asked him to be seated, Mr. Mayer was busy. Woody picked up a copy of the studio paper and read a story about the success of this new company. Mr. Mayer headed production. Sam Goldwyn was an executive producer. Included on the staff were Irving Thalberg, Harry Rapf and Robert Z. Leonard. Leonard had been producing the Mae Murray pictures on the Metropolitan lot and came over with the merger as a director. Howard Strickling, publicist, had also shifted over with the Metro staff.

"Mr. Mayer will see you now, Mr. Van Dyke."

Woody was on his feet. This is it — no more sitting on the outside looking in. Escorted into the chief executive's office, he was greeted with, "Van Dyke, we'd like to have you with us."

"There's no place I'd rather be, Mr. Mayer!"

They agreed on salary, shook hands and Van Dyke said, "When do I start?"

"Right now," replied Mr. Mayer. "We've got a new star under contract and we've been having some trouble getting the right kind of story for him. After the splendid way you handled Buck Jones, we're convinced you're the man for the job."

"Who is your star, Mr. Mayer?"

"Tim McCoy."

"You mean the cowboy!!!"

"Yes," replied Mr. Mayer, "Tim McCoy." Not giving Van a chance to say another word, he continued, "There'll be a story conference at eight o'clock tomorrow morning."

With that, Louis B. Mayer was gone and Woody Van Dyke stood there, stunned.

Every time Van Dyke walked into a studio's front office he came out with a deal he hadn't gone in to get.

M-G-M . . . and Cowboys!!

For a moment he was disappointed — but only for a moment. A deal was a deal, and he had agreed. After all, he was working for Louis B. Mayer, and that was something. Woody headed for the publicity department. He wanted to find out what he could about this McCoy fellow. Humph! A cowboy!

He told the receptionist in publicity that he was the new director for Tim McCoy and asked to see the head of the department. The girl made a phone call and Mr. Van Dyke was shown to the office of an assistant. Woody knew then that even though he was in at M-G-M, the "Inner Circle" had an outer crust.

For two cents he would have gone home but the assistant publicity man grabbed him by the hand and said, "I'm Howard Strickling. Glad to have you with us, Mr. Van Dyke." The young man's enthusiasm made a hit with Woody, so he decided to stick around and see what he could find out. Like all good publicists, Howard was thoroughly sold on any new combination and Van Dyke and McCoy sounded good to him. He wasted no time in getting the Tim McCoy files out and in seconds had them spread over his desk. Van Dyke was impressed.

In the first photograph Strickling handed him, McCoy was in the uniform of a Colonel of the U. S. Cavalry. Howard explained . . . During McCoy's period in the Army, he had been Regimental Adjutant for the State of Wyoming. The Colonel had had much to do with the Arapahos and Shoshones on the Wind River Indian Reservation and was one of the few white men alive who could carry on a conversation with the red men in their graceful and graphic sign language. Colonel McCoy had also served on the staff of the late General Scott, who was former Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army and recognized as one of the nation's foremost authorities on Indian problems. McCoy, Van Dyke was told, learned much while with the old general about how to handle Indians and settle their affairs amicably — like sending uniforms to the Big Chief as a token of friendship. The Indian Chief would put on the general's dress blue uniform with all its gold braid and then, in full feather headdress and with moccasins on, he would call all the other chiefs into conference to show them his close friendship with the Great White Chief in Washington.

Woody realized he hadn't inherited a cowboy star at all but an extremely colorful personality who had actually been adopted by the Arapaho tribe and given the name "High Eagle." Colonel Tim McCoy's experiences with the American Indians gave Van Dyke a new slant. Woody's imagination was alive. Here was a new tangent . . . an authentic and legitimate historical background for some wonderful screen stories.

Howard Strickling said, "Have you all the information you want?"

"I certainly have."

Strickling replied, "Now, about you? I've got to set up a file on you, you know." Van Dyke didn't say a word, crossed the room, took Howard's coat and hat off the rack, handed them to him and said, "I'm hungry as hell. Where do we eat?" Strickling hadn't a chance. They were off the lot in an instant. Van introduced Howard to Napoleon and his dog, Damn, and in twenty minutes they were all eating hot chili in Van's apartment . . . that is, all except Damn — it was the only thing he wouldn't eat. Anyone who went to Van Dyke's apartment ate his home-made chili.

Strickling, while enjoying Van Dyke's wonderful hospitality, kept firing questions at him, trying to get data on Van for his files . . . But Van Dyke was thinking — thinking of Tim McCoy and Indians!

Chapter 16

COLONEL TIM McCOY AND INDIANS

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Colonel Tim McCoy and Indians

At eight o'clock the following morning, an important story conference was under way at M-G-M. Present in the room were a dozen writers, several producers, some studio executives, assistants and associates. Tim McCoy was at the far end of a long table and Van Dyke stood in a corner.

In a few minutes the meeting was in session. Enough story ideas filled that room in the next thirty minutes to keep the studio going for a year.

This sort of thing had been going on for five months but McCoy was still without a story. Van Dyke hadn't spoken a word. He was just "stall" walking, back and forth across the room, listening while everybody else did the talking. They were talking cowboy. He was thinking McCoy and Indians.

Tim McCoy looked at his watch. He had now been under contract five months, one day and exactly forty minutes, when a voice louder than any of the most vociferous in the room rang out. "Does anyone here know what the hell he's talking about?" Cigar ashes dropped on the table . . . associates turned pale. . . all heads swung in unison to the far corner of the room. Van Dyke with hands on his hips repeated, "I said, does anyone in this room know what he's talking about?" Before they had time to speak, Van Dyke grabbed McCoy by the arm, "Let's get out of here," he said, and they scrammed. Across the street in a coffee shop Van Dyke inquired about the Indians on the Wind River Reservation in Wyoming. McCoy told him there were two tribes there, the Arapahos and the Shoshones, and that they had been feuding for centuries. "That's our story," said Van Dyke, as he slapped McCoy on the back. Woody made some notes on the back of an envelope, told the Colonel, "Don't worry about it, go home and get some sleep tonight. I'll have a story in the morning."

Woody did have a story, and he called it "War Paint." The studio accepted, and casting for the first Tim McCoy was posted on the call board. The story was written about the Arapahos and Shoshones.

Van Dyke took the entire company to the Wind River Indian Reservation. He wanted real Indians and, too, this enabled him to photograph them in the authentic background of their own natural haunts. The reservation was located about seventy-five miles south of Jackson Hole National Park, the westernmost entrance to Yellowstone, and the country was ideal for photography. Much of the action took place in the vicinity of Fort Washakie and the Great Teton Peaks. The Indians for the most part could speak and understand enough English to get along, but there were a few old chiefs who couldn't understand English at all. One of these old bucks was Chief Goes-In-Lodge, a very close friend and brother, by adoption, of Colonel Tim's. McCoy taught Van Dyke the Indian sign language so that he and the Chiefs could understand one another. Through this means of communication, Woody found that one of their tribe, an Indian named "Left Hand," had fought against Custer. This fellow had been a renegade, escaping from the reservation many years ago to fight against the general. Had he been caught at the time, he would have paid with his life. However, having sneaked back into the reservation unobserved, the only evidence was hearsay and one can't be prosecuted on hearsay evidence. Old Left Hand felt that his only restitution was to become an American soldier, so Tim and Van kept him dressed in a blue uniform of Civil War days of a first sergeant's rank. He wore this uniform all of the time. With moccasins and three feathers stuck in his hair, he made a picturesque, even though amusing, sight.

Van Dyke was curious about the unusual Indian names and asked the Colonel how they came into being. McCoy explained they were the Engish translation of the original Indian word.

For example, Chief Goes-In-Lodge was the English translation of an original Indian name given as the result of an incident that actually happened. While a young warrior, the chief slipped into the tent, or "lodge" of an enemy tribe and killed all the occupants while they slept. The Indians referred to the incident as "Goes-into-the-Lodge," resulting in the name "Goes-In-Lodge." This, the Colonel pointed out, was typical of all Indian names: "Wade-in-Water" for the fellow who couldn't swim; "Yellow Coyote" for the one afraid; "Strike-on-Top," the warrior who always hit his opponent on the top of the head with his tomahawk. Then there was old man "Afraid-of-His-Horse." This colorful Indian, however, was not given his name because he was afraid of his horse. He was such a fearless and mighty warrior that even the sight of his horse frightened all the other Indians.

Looking at a group picture of old timers, in search for types, Van Dyke pointed out a most unusual looking fellow. Tim McCoy said, "That's Charlie White Man." Woody laughed, "Charlie White Man? What's his background?" The colonel explained that this fellow actually was a white man. When a baby, he had been captured by the Ute tribe while on the warpath. No one actually knew who his parents were. The Utes destroyed a settlement or possibly a covered wagon, and some brave took the child for his squaw to raise instead of killing him. He never learned English and was raised as an Indian. He was later captured from the Utes by the Arapahos who, because of his background, gave him an Indian name, the American translation of which was "Charlie White Man." Tim explained that although Charlie was a full-blooded white, he was every inch Indian from long black hair to nature and character.

The "War Paint" company was a motley outfit. The Arapahos were big fellows and the Shoshones little guys. Van Dyke had engaged a group of Cossacks because of their outstanding horsemanship as trick riders; and he also engaged a bunch of real cowboys, who had been herding cattle in Wyoming, to get the kind of roping and rough riding he wanted. Woody found that when Arapahos, Shoshones, Cossacks and real cowboys are turned loose in a bull pen, quite a show follows. Many times Van Dyke was in trouble. His biggest problem was with the Indians in war scenes. After a few disastrous attempts to stage these fights, he found it necessary to keep a sharp eye on them all of the time. The "feudin'" factions would dig the barrels of their guns into the sand and then fire at the enemy. The sand acted as fine-grained buck shot and even though using blanks the guns, when fired at close range, would make a nasty wound. This happened several times and Van Dyke had a real war on his hands.

To get the best out of the cowboys and Cossacks, Woody would play one against the other. He'd have lunch with the

Cossacks while Tim McCoy would brew a pot of coffee with the cowboys. Van, in casual conversation, would say the cowboys were bragging how much better they could ride than the Cossacks; McCoy would tell the cowboys the Cossacks said they were amateurs when it came to riding. Immediately after one of these sessions, Van would call for a scene to be made. The results were always great. With the Cossacks trying to out-ride the cowboys; the cowboys trying to out-buck, rope and hogtie the Cossacks; and some private feuding between the Arapahos and Shoshones on the side, a take on "War Paint" was often an event that would have thrilled even the gladiators on the most daring of Roman holidays.

An actor's life on that picture was on the verge of a crisis most of the time. To make the battle scenes appear realistic, Harry Albiez, the property man, would place dummies around the battle ground for "dead men." Extras would then be planted among the dummies. To make the shot effective, the extras were supposed to move as though wounded, dying. To give the scene a final deft touch, Van would instruct Indians to ride through the battle ground, swinging their tomahawks from left to right, hitting the dummies on the head — not the extras. This was fine, as far as instructions went, but the movie makers learned that when a bunch of real red-blooded Indians go on the warpath, even in fun, they get excited. In fact, they got so darned excited in "War Paint" they never took time to pick out the dummies from the extras and hit them all on the head. It was soon extremely difficult to find extras for these scenes.

After about a week's time, the outfit became a well organized unit; that is, as well organized as it could be under the circumstances. A pet stunt of the cowboys was to talk Van Dyke into using the Cossacks as Indians for certain scenes. The Cossack is a great trick rider as long as he has something on the horse to hang on to, but when cast as an Indian, he must ride bareback and therefore is handicapped. The cowboys loved this and would then really ride herd on the Cossacks — "Cossack-Indians," guns and "scalps" would be scattered all over the plains.

"War Paint" had been photographed in record time. A group of studio officials were screening it in a projection room at M-G-M. Robert Z. Leonard, ace director, was among those present. He had been passing by and heard they were screening an exciting Indian film so stopped in out of curiosity. The picture was a five-reeler. After seeing a few reels, Mr. Leonard inquired who had made the picture. He was told it had been directed by a fellow named Van Dyke. "Who's Van Dyke?" inquired R. Z. Mr. Leonard was informed he was the new director assigned to the McCoy pictures. Leonard said he had never seen more beautiful photography, such split-second action, and perfect continuity of story. Leonard told Irving Thalberg that Van Dyke had no business making Indian pictures. Any man, he said, who could get that kind of photography, action, and story on film in twelve days, when the best directors in the profession couldn't do better in thirty days, really had something.

"War Paint" was a great success and opened a new field for this type of action film. As a result of the excellent photography, Van made Clyde De Vinna a regular member of his crew. Harry Albiez was put in charge of props; Pop Arnold, grips; and Bob Rose, "special events," from that time on.

Van Dyke's second Tim McCoy was titled "Winners of the Wilderness" and introduced a new leading lady, Lucille LeSueur — who later changed her name to Joan Crawford. This was Crawford's first starring role. The plan then was a different leading lady for each picture. He shot "Wyoming," starring Tim McCoy and Dorothy Sebastian, while at the same time shooting "Explorers of the West" with Mc Coy and Marjorie Daw. This was Van's way of keeping costs down . . . shoot two pictures at the same time while in the Indian territory. They would work for a time on one picture, change wardrobe and leading ladies and then shoot an hour or so on the other picture. He completed both stories in thirty days.

They were not without their fun on these jaunts. The unit had a colored handy man whose name was Blue Washington. The Indians learned that the negro was scared to death of snakes. He had no peace from that time on. The Indians would wait until he fell asleep, as he frequently did between takes. They would burst forth with a terrifying Indian war whoop and throw a dead rattlesnake in his face. S-a-w-i-s-h! There was a blue streak as Blue Washington lit out across the plains.

Colonel McCoy was respected by Indians, cowboys, and Cossacks. He had been a real cow puncher himself, prior to his experience in the U.S. Cavalry and knew his ropin' and ridin' mighty well. He also handled a pair of six-shooters with exceptional ease. In dealing with so many firearms, great care had to be exercised to avoid possible accidents. Van Dyke was one of the finest rifle shots in the west. When a scene called for a bullet to splinter wood in an actor's face peering around the corner of a building, or chip bark off a tree while fighting it out, Van Dyke made the shots himself. In the event of an accident, he would then shoulder the responsibility himself and not place that burden on someone else. Other common rifle shots included knocking a hat off somebody's head or kicking dust up at the feet.

Because many actors used guns, orders were issued to all that each load his own gun so that he would know only blanks were used. On one occasion a property man gave Tim McCoy his six-shooters. McCoy started to recheck the shells in the chambers. The property man told McCoy he didn't have to check the guns as he had loaded them himself, that he hadn't made a mistake in twenty-five years. The Colonel assured him he didn't doubt his word but that it was his policy and that of Van's personally to check each shell. To the surprise and astonishment of the poor property man, Tim McCoy found one live shell in the twelve. Van Dyke told the property man that he may have been in the show business for twenty-five years, but he almost limited Tim McCoy's career to a much shorter time. Once while inspecting the shells, Van Dyke found a .32 calibre bullet wedged inside a blank cartridge of higher calibre. Had the blank been fired, the .32 would have acted as a slug and resulted in serious injury to someone. Woody knew all these angles because of his long experience handling firearms on the legitimate stage. He knew how easy it was to get live shells mixed up with dead ones while moving around so much, packing and repacking. Strictest discipline was demanded when handling firearms and his orders had to be obeyed to the letter. He never had a fatal accident.

Tim had a close shave in one Indian picture. It was in a fight scene that called for the Colonel to ride at break-neck speed, firing both guns from right to left. Van's gravest concern during such action shots was to keep the Indians from getting out of hand. One old buck got excited and came charging up from behind, leveled his gun at McCoy, and fired right into Tim's ear and the back of his neck. The chief was so close the shot bolted McCoy's horse throwing Tim into the air. The cowboy star did a half turn landing on his back, skidding across the road like a baseball player sliding into home plate. Woody thought this was a beautiful shot, but oh, what a dejected Irish cowboy. They carried McCoy into an emergency hospital tent and it took the doctor three hours to pick the black powder out from the back of his right ear, neck and shoulder. There wasn't any skin left on his back where he'd skidded across the road. McCoy had been in the emergency hospital two and a half hours when Van Dyke came into the tent with Clyde De Vinna, his cameraman. Woody propped McCoy up and putting grease paint on the good side of his face said, "It would take more than a fall like that to kill an Irishman." De Vinna shot a close-up, thereby finishing that picture.

They broke camp the next day and rode a hundred and twenty-five miles back to the unit headquarters. Every time the studio car hit a bump Colonel McCoy wished he had never left the Army and the Adjutant General's office in Wyoming in 1922. Van would laugh and kid the blazes out of him each time he let out a groan. This, Colonel McCoy soon discovered, was Van Dyke's way of covering up his real sentimentality with this outward appearance of utter brutality. It was the only way Van Dyke could keep the unit from cracking up when such accidents occurred. It was this attitude that had pulled them through time and time again. Woody actually was extremely concerned but couldn't afford to let McCoy know it, nor the Indians working with them.

The studio changed unit managers on these Indian pictures almost as frequently as they changed leading ladies. One manager was told by Van Dyke to go out on the range and round up a hundred Indians and have them on the set ready to photograph by seven o'clock the next morning. He gave explicit orders that he personally bring them into camp, knowing as he did that it was the only way to get a hundred Indians together. The unit man, a new chap, did it the Hollywood way. He got hold of a couple of Indians and told them to round up the other ninety-eight Indians. The next day Van

Dyke waited all morning for his Indians but only a few stragglers showed up. The company was eating lunch in the commissary tent when the unit manager, who had been occupied with other business, dropped by and poked his head in the tent. "Did your Indians show up all right, Mr. Van Dyke?" Van Dyke never took his eyes off the man in the doorway as he reached behind him and grabbed a quart can of tomatoes and let it fly through the air. If the can of tomatoes had not ricocheted off the tent post it might have proved fatal to the unit manager.

The company's next unit manager was much younger than the other men. He had been told that Van Dyke was spending too much money and to keep expenses down. One day they were shooting Indian falls in battle scenes where the horse somersaults and the rider spills over the top of him, supposedly dead. This stunt calls for great skill and training on the part of both horse and rider. It is a rough trick for close-ups and Van Dyke always liked to use Bob Rose, dressed as an Indian, in these shots. The price was $150 for this particular type of fall. Rose had done two of them already that day and Woody wanted a third. The young unit manager, conscientiously attending to his job, bypassed Mr. Van Dyke and went direct to Bob Rose and asked if there wasn't a cheaper way he could fall. Rose told the unit man that he did only what Van Dyke asked him to do. The unit manager said, "I know, but the studio thinks we're spending too much money for these things. You've already earned $300 today for just two spills. Haven't you got any other kind that doesn't cost so much?" Bob told him he had one where he could step off the horse and run out of the scene. The manager said, "How much does that cost?" "A hundred dollars." "Do that one this time." The stunt man said, "What about Van Dyke?" The younger man said, "Oh, he won't know the difference." "Okay," said Rose, as he rode away, "but just in case he does and won't accept this one, it'll still cost you a hundred dollars."

The cameras started to roll. Van Dyke gave the signal for action and Rose came galloping into the scene. Instead of the spectacular "Flying W" which had been called for, "Indian" Bob Rose stepped out of the stirrups, the horse rolled over, and Bob Rose ran out of the picture. The unit manager was standing in back of Van Dyke. "That was fine, wasn't it, Mr. Van Dyke?" Van yelled "Cut" and didn't answer the young man. He didn't even look at him. With lower jaw now set and lips tight, Van Dyke leaned back in his chair with his right foot on his left knee, twirling a cigarette between his thumb and forefinger. When Rose got on his horse and reported back to the director, Woody, without changing expressions, said, "Okay, Rose, now we'll do it the hundred and fifty dollar way." The unit manager said, "It looked good to me, Mr. Van Dyke." Van Dyke exploded, "Did you ever see a dead Indian run away from his horse? And, what's more, you're going to pay for that hundred dollar shot."

A new executive joined the M-G-M production staff. He said the public was not interested in historical pictures and that McCoy should do straight Westerns, like Buck Jones. Van Dyke said it would never work out, McCoy's pictures had been successful because of the authentic and historical backgrounds.

Tim McCoy did one picture for an English director. The new director was a real treat. He even took time out to rehearse lines, action and establish mood. He taught McCoy how to emote . . . to live his lines. In fact, he taught McCoy how to act. Reassigned to Van Dyke in "Explorers of the West," McCoy started "hamming" all over the place in the first take. Van Dyke screamed, "Cut." He grabbed a stage brace and continued, "If I even catch you trying to act, I'll wrap this around your stiff neck." Tim decided quickly to remain just plain McCoy on all future Van Dyke productions.

This was the last picture, however, that Woody did with McCoy and it was completed in September, 1927.

There was another argument with the production staff. Van Dyke wouldn't budge. If his name was going to be on a picture, it was going to be done the way he saw it. Despite Van's objections and the big grosses of the McCoy pictures, the new executive's orders stuck and Tim McCoy found himself with a new director.

This proved to be an important turning point in the lives of both McCoy and Van Dyke, though neither knew it at the time. Tim went into straight Westerns but they were not as successful as his previous historical pictures. He learned shortly after the change was made that Van's next story for him had been "Charge of the Light Brigade," but the break had come and it was never made. It would have been a sensational McCoy vehicle.

Van Dyke was retained on the lot and given a picture called "Under the Black Eagle." It was the story of a dog in World War I, and featured Ralph Forbes and Marceline Day. But his next assignment, "White Shadows in the South Seas" proved to be the most important in his life and the turning point in his career.

Chapter 17

"WHITE SHADOWS IN THE SOUTH SEAS"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

"White Shadows in the South Seas"

In November, 1927, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer launched their first large-scale attempt at adventure films, "White Shadows in the South Seas." This movie was to introduce a new idea in pictorial story telling — fiction, with authentic background.

Everyone on the lot was excited about the idea because the studio was going to send a company to the South Seas to photograph the story.

Van Dyke wanted the assignment for he had always advocated authenticity in films and even though this story was fiction, the background and setting were the real thing.

M-G-M, however, felt the story required a man who knew the islands well, so they brought in an outsider to direct. He was Robert Flaherty and was chosen because of his previous outstanding success in photographing "Moana of the South Seas" and "Nanook of the North." He was considered an authority on the South Seas and had had considerable experience in dealing with natives.

Van Dyke was offered the job as studio representative because of his efficiency in organizing location units. He had proved his ability in this respect on his jaunts to Wyoming with the McCoy units.Woody was a work-horse and M-G-M knew he could be relied upon to get the equipment there and back.

The job sounded good to Van for he felt it would provide an excellent opportunity to divorce himself from the Western influence and, too, he liked the idea of the trip, so he accepted. Van Dyke, like so many other people, had always wanted to see those islands. The mere phrase "The South Seas" spelled magic . . . sunny seas, golden beaches, kindly people, luxuriant growth of tropical flowers, and absence of convention.

Van Dyke was assigned as Associate Director. But somebody in releasing the story abbreviated the word "Associate" and it was picked up to mean Assistant. Thus, literally at least, he experienced his first demotion. He received many letters from friends wanting to know why he had been demoted to an assistant director. He made no fuss about these letters because he knew the story got out by mistake and was not done with intent to harm anyone.

He never liked publicity, anyway. In fact, Howard Strickling was still trying to get a Van Dyke file set up for the studio publicity department and hadn't succeeded as yet.

When the photographers started making still photos of the expedition for press releases, Van stepped into the background. If asked for a statement, he would say, "See the director."

Van's mother knew that the right kind of publicity was important in this business. She tried to get him to let them know something about the background of his family — the Henry Van Dyke on one side, and the F.F.V's on the other side — but Woody said he didn't want to ride in on somebody else's achievements. Mrs. Van Dyke told her son he would wind up a little fish in a big pond if he didn't come to his senses, but not even she could change his mind once it was set on anything. His only interest at the moment was the expedition itself and the backstage mechanics necessary to make it tick. That — the studio had said — was his job! After all, he reasoned, Flaherty is the authority on Tahiti and the director of the picture, so he's the one to publicize. Woody dismissed the whole thing and engaged himself in the task of becoming thoroughly familiar with the job that was before him. Just prior to sailing, Van Dyke was given instructions by the studio to the effect that there were certain sequences in the picture . . general run-of-the-mill stuff . . . that would have to be handled in a more or less cold, routine fashion, and he was to shoot these. They made it clear, though, that he was to have nothing to do with the delicate stuff with the natives that Flaherty was responsible for.

Woody again carefully picked his own key men to make the trip with him: Clyde De Vinna, cameraman; Harry Albiez, props; and Pop Arnold, grips. All three had started out with Van on the Tim McCoy picture, "War Paint."

In converting the story "White Shadows in the South Seas" into picture material, every effort had been made to promote realism and actuality. South Sea experts had been called in to verify every scene that was written. Only three well known players were assigned parts in the cast — Monte Blue, Robert Anderson and Racquel Torres. The rest of the cast — sailors, pearlers, merchants, beach combers and natives — were all to be chosen on the spot when they arrived at the Islands, and would be selected from the various professions they were to depict in the story.

At two o'clock on the afternoon of November 30, 1927, the unit sailed from pier 33 at San Francisco. Their ship, R.M.S. "TAHITI" passed down the Bay of San Francisco on a perfect California day, and within an hour dropped their pilot outside the World Famous Golden Gate, and set course for Papeete, on the Island of Tahiti, ten days' sail across the vast and beautiful blue Pacific.

The Island of Tahiti rose from the sea early on the morning of December 10th. Van Dyke and his own crew were on deck. This was what they had waited long to see. For them, nowhere in the Pacific was there a spot so full of legend and charm. As the steamer approached, the lowly reaches of the coast and the break of the water over the coral reefs came into view. There, before them stretched the steep green slopes of the hills clothed in rich and varied vegetation . . . bright green shades of breadfruit trees and the soft green foliage of the banana. Van Dyke was experiencing one of the great thrills of his life. He had read much about The Society Islands. They are eleven in number, and belonged to the French. They were named in honor of the Royal Society, through which a British scientific mission had been sent in the year 1769, under the command of Captain Cook, to observe from the Island of Tahiti the transit of Venus across the sun's disc. The Society Islands are among the most beautiful and picturesque in the world. Tahiti is the largest of the group, its circumference estimated at from one hundred ten to one hundred thirty miles.

A tropical downpour suddenly greeted the voyagers as the steamer safely navigated through the tiny channel in the coral reef into Papeete's small but deep lagoon. The moviemakers disembarked and Van Dyke's crew went right to work. There was much casting to be done and preparation of sets. The population of the Islands was about nine thousand, of whom one tenth were French, British and other Europeans. There were also large numbers of Chinese. Papeete is the Capital and seat of Government for all the surrounding Islands. The company found Papeete a little town of the most striking contrasts, though decidedly French in character. The Market Place was the center of Papeetian life and of greatest interest to Van Dyke. They were looking for types, and there was an abundance of these. At five o'clock in the morning it was a picturesque sight. The native costumes and variety of goods displayed gave Woody wonderful ideas.

The first job was to select the cast from people on the spot. This was not difficult. A few trips to the Market at night, where all types of men and women — French, English, American, Chinese, and Tahitians — mingled and the cast was hand picked.

Van Dyke's portion of the story called for a somewhat modern native village and he sailed through it with no trouble — as he always did.

Mr. Flaherty had tramped endless miles looking for particular locations with just the right lighting and setting, but had not found what he wanted. In the meantime, Van and his crew set up a portable lab and developed the film they had shot. This was done to avoid any chance of the negatives spoiling before reaching the studio. Clyde De Vinna, in addition to being cameraman, was a ham radio operator and had brought a portable set along. He wired the studio that Van's portion of the film had been shot and developed and was great. In a few days a wire came back from the studio, "What about the Flaherty stuff?" An answer was radioed back to the studio saying it was not ready yet.

Director Flaherty was having his troubles. Among other things, the unit's interpreter had landed in jail twenty-four hours after the company arrived on the island. The interpreter's credentials had been good when applying for the job at the studio, but apparently he had been involved in some kind of an affair on his last visit to Tahiti that had not been settled to the satisfaction of the local authorities. This man was important to the company, for the interpreter was the main contact with the natives. The islanders became suspicious of the movie people because of this jail episode and stories started as a result that made for more difficulties. Flaherty and M-G-M were not involved, but they couldn't convince the natives of that.

Time went on. And more complications arose. And more wires came. Tahiti has always been noted as a rendezvous for modern Marco Polos and writers of adventure yarns. Some of these local writers stepped in to aid in solving the problem and the situation became even more complex. One of the more delicate sequences in the picture called for a waterfall. A spot was selected in a canyon but Clyde De Vinna, head cameraman, insisted there wasn't enough light there and that they had "black rocks" for background. Reflectors were of no value as there was no sunshine in the canyon to reflect. Portable lights and generators were not sent out on location trips, so they were stuck. The cast refused to work in the waterfall as it was dangerous with so little light. More wires went back to Hollywood. As far as the studio was concerned, the expedition had not worked out at all and costs were piling up. Woody had remained in the background all of the time. This was not a Van Dyke picture, so as far as he was concerned Flaherty and the studio were the ones to work it out, not he.

Flaherty resigned and returned to Hollywood. George Kann of the studio arrived on the next boat. He had been sent down to find out what the trouble was. He cornered everybody in the company but couldn't get any satisfaction. Finally he was able to catch Van Dyke, but all he got out of him was, "I don't know what's wrong. I've done what I was told to do." The studio executive explained, "But Van, the overhead is terrific — what are we going to do?" Woody said, "You tell me." Van Dyke was too wise to inject himself into the situation. He was only an assistant on this job. A deal was a deal to him, and he had fulfilled his part. He had no quarrel with Flaherty or the studio, so played it strictly neutral. While the wires were going back and forth, Van was exploring the Islands and talking with the natives, learning all he could about their customs, habits and background. They were a fine and handsome people even though civilization and liquor had somewhat deteriorated the race. The Tahitians, according to Captain Cook's record, originally surpassed all other races in physical beauty. "White Shadows in the South Seas" was a story of native life on the Islands both before and after the white man's influence was felt. Van was observing every activity within the range of eyes and ears. He spent much time, too, on a big rock overlooking the lagoon and watched natives spear fish while swimming, or make a catch with their unique hand nets.

Clyde De Vinna suggested to Mr. Kann that Van Dyke take over and finish the picture. The studio executive explained, "Why, he can't do a picture like this — it requires polish and finesse. Van's a Western director, an action man. This stuff's too delicate for him!" But, this idea started Kann thinking. He studied the situation more carefully. Another boat wouldn't be down that way for a month and this further delay would cost the studio an additional fifty or sixty thousand dollars. He wired M-G-M that it would be cheaper to give Van Dyke a shot at it than to send another man down. In the meantime, the film Van Dyke had made had arrived at the studio and they were delighted with it. After a few days deliberation, Kann received a wire — "Okay, Van Dyke."

Actually by a fluke, Van Dyke found himself saddled with the greatest responsibility of his career. But he hadn't been caught napping. This was the opportunity he had fought and hoped for. Van Dyke didn't believe in breaks. He knew there were several back at the studio who didn't like him or think him capable of handling this type of story. He hadn't wasted a minute since he set foot on the Island and when his opportunity came, he was ready for it. He knew every line of that story from start to finish, and what's more, had every scene worked out in his own mind. The entire company was called together and informed that Van Dyke was in complete charge, and he immediately started briefing the men on their assignments like a general giving out a well-organized plan. The first move was a radiogram to Hollywood for lights and a generator truck. The canyon waterfall experience had taught them all a great lesson and from that time on, M-G-M always sent lights and generators on all locations. No one had thought of using artificial lights in the daytime, but when they arrived it was proved they could eliminate the shadows in the canyon.

An Islander was engaged as interpreter and the picture got under way. Van Dyke's chief difficulty at first was with the natives. He couldn't get them to take movie-making seriously. The fact that Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer was spending over a half a million dollars in the effort meant little or nothing to them. But after awhile they ceased to be giddy and laugh and they then became pliable, amenable, and in many instances, truly histrionic. One little native boy was given an important part in the picture and gave a remarkable performance.

Woody sailed into the sequences with everything he had. One after another they were on film. One scene caught the eyes of the powers-that-be at the studio the minute they got a copy of it. It was the one in the trees where Monte Blue was trying to teach the native girl to whistle.

Due to the long delay and the circumstances involved, there was considerable restlessness and tension among the crew. The old Van Dyke esprit de corps again became much in evidence. The pranks started to occur. Many a night someone would let out a yell just as the lights went out in his room. Probably a land crab or some other such monster had been stuck in the corner of the room, or between the sheets. The land crab is a horrible looking creature whose bones actually rattle as he runs across the ground. The coconut crab never figured in on the unit's pranks as they were too dangerous. They can snap a branch in two as easily as you can snap a toothpick in half. Even this crazy gang knew you could carry a joke too far, and, anyway, they all needed their arms and legs.

Woody had his problems in this respect, too. He hated bugs and insects of any kind — just couldn't stand to have them touch him. Many thought this a show with Van, but it wasn't. He had a hypersensitive skin and couldn't stand being touched by anything. It was a known fact that if anyone walked up to Van Dyke and patted him on the cheek, as one sometimes does to a friend, he would probably get poked right in the nose. Van couldn't help it, he would swing before he knew what he was doing. This happened on a few occasions and caused him much embarrassment. He would apologize but would do it again if another unsuspecting soul repeated the act. The flies, moths, mosquitoes, ants, spiders and other insects of the South Sea Islands led him a merry chase. Frequently, while working, Van Dyke would burst out in the darndest shadow boxing exhibition ever seen. Some silly little moth, fly or mosquito had unsuspectingly zoomed too close to his cheek and Socko! . . . a barrage of lefts and rights went flying. The most amusing sight was Van's tent. The legs of his bed and all of the chairs were set in cans of kerosene so the more inquisitive little guys couldn't climb up and start investigating.

Fourteen men comprised the crew on "White Shadows": Four cameramen, one property man, one grip (stage hand), two electricians, one generator man, two lab men and one construction man or set builder. The cast — Monte Blue, Bob Anderson (a Danish actor), Racquel Torres, Rene Bush, and an old Hawaiian character woman, and Lucy.

Lucy, a native girl, was the niece of Lovina, proprietor of the Tahiti Hotel. She was very large and could out-swear any man in the outfit. Asked where she learned to speak that kind of English, she said she went to school in Los Angeles for six months. Van Dyke had to keep an eye on Pop Arnold and Harry Albiez as they always gave Lucy a bad time. Lucy's means of transportation was a bicycle, and one day Pop and Harry waited their chance and rigged a battery to the seat. When Lucy came out of the hotel and climbed on the bike, the shock sent her in the air and she slapped the tar out of a poor unsuspecting native just passing by.

Racquel Torres, the fiery little Mexican star, learned one of Van Dyke's famous ways of getting an important scene on film. She had never worked for him before so was not aware of how he accomplished things sometimes. They were trying to make a shot that called for some of the bombastic temperament that Racquel was famous for, but Van Dyke couldn't get her mad enough. Woody stopped work, told everyone to relax for awhile and winked at the cameraman. Harry Albiez saw Van wink and said, "Oh, oh, here it comes!" The director went over to Torres and to get her mind off the picture, started to talk about other things. The conversation "happened" to switch to Mexico. Immediately, the little Mexican star became her natural self and bubbled over with enthusiasm, telling Van Dyke all about her native land. Woody said he was very interested in Mexico, too. "In fact," he said, "some day I want to make a picture on location there to show the world just how filthy dirty the Mexicans really are." If a bomb had been dropped in the middle of the set there couldn't have been any more fireworks. The raging Mexican spitfire tore into Van Dyke like a crazed wildcat. Woody gave Clyde De Vinna the cue . . . did the prettiest sashay out of the scene the cameraman ever saw . . . and he photographed the best burn any actress ever portrayed on film. Of course, immediately after the take, Van Dyke grabbed Racquel in his arms and told her what a wonderful actress she was. But he had to apologize every day after that for a month for all the nasty things she said he had said about a country he was really fond of.

Van Dyke's crew had their problems, too. Harry Albiez, one of the finest property men in the business, had cleaned the studio property department out of everything that even looked like the South Seas before sailing. But when they arrived at the island, he found he couldn't use half the stuff he lugged along. Tapa cloths, utensils, and gadgets of the kind used by the natives had to be acquired on the island. One day, after Harry had spent a whole night acquiring props, the natives refused to go on the set. Try as Van Dyke did, he couldn't get them near the stage. The interpreter found out that one of the tapa cloths Harry used to dress the set with had been touched by the King. This meant the set was tabu, for the natives believed if the King touched anything it was sacrilege for them to touch it, and the leprosy curse would result as a penalty to anyone who did. Van Dyke told Harry to be more careful about such things, but Woody almost got caught himself the next day. He was sitting in a small boat tied up to a dock when a fellow passing by yelled, "Get out of that boat!" Van Dyke just gave him a dirty look as if to say, "Yeah — you put me out!" The fellow came back with, "Okay, stay in there if you want to, but that's the boat they move the lepers in." A leaping "leper" landed on the dock in one jump.

Problems developed when the lights and generator truck arrived. The natives kept pulling the plugs out and couldn't resist touching the lamps. To eliminate this trouble, the electricians got the interpreter to tell the natives that the lights might explode. Upon returning from lunch one noon, Van Dyke came back to the main building where they had been doing some indoor close-ups. Several of the big lamps were in place. The building was of the same design as most of the structures on the island, the walls nothing but plaited palms. Several natives were enjoying a noonday nap in the building along with a few crew members. Woody thought of a quick way to wake them up. He told Pop Arnold to get a smoke bomb and throw it into the middle of the group just as Van fired his .45 calibre pistol. In a matter of seconds, the building was empty, but it didn't look as it had a few moments before. The natives had gone straight through the plaited palm walls. They thought the lamps had exploded. Woody's set, after that, had many more exits than the next scene called for.

Life on the Island of Tahiti was very different from life in the U.S.A. The tropical climate quickly spoiled foods, especially fish and basic edibles. The white cast and members of the studio crew were supplied daily rations from their own commissary which was equipped with refrigeration and replenished by ship from the States. The natives had no refrigeration so their food was supplied through daily markets. Wild oranges, lemons, bananas and other fruits were plentiful and wouldn't spoil so quickly, but the basic foods had to be purchased each day at the market. One of the most important scenes in the picture was the native feast. Van Dyke insisted on this being an exact reproduction of those held on the islands. He told a native drum boy to notify the people of the islands to bring in food for the big feast scene. Their means of communication was by talking drum so the boy started beating out the message. In a short time natives appeared from all directions bringing fruit, fish, crustaceans, bark, roots, and fowl — everything they could get their hands on. Van Dyke had never seen so much food, but his plan nearly resulted in a calamity. They had cleaned out the daily market and there wasn't enough food left for their own needs. When they were seated at the banquet table for the picture and were told to eat they were so hungry they ate up all the food before the shot was finished. Van Dyke had to repeat this stunt each day for five days before he got what he wanted on film.

Woody's past experience in handling Indians helped him considerably in working out these problems with the natives, especially when it came to acting. He found that they would do what they were told, naturally, just as long as they didn't have to memorize or speak lines.

Van Dyke would not shoot a scene that did not have the approval of the men on the spot who had spent their lives under the Southern Cross. In reenacting the scenes of past native life — before the white man came — the oldest natives of several islands were called into consultation for assurance that nothing of white civilization would creep into the spirit of the pre-white days on the islands. Relics of the island, dating back into forgotten antiquity were borrowed from museums and island families and used as hand props in production. One band of natives rehearsed a dance for four weeks before one scene was shot of it. Van Dyke spent much time with this group showing them some of the steps he would like to have them do. The pearl diving was done by some forty divers from Hikueru, and in the underwater scenes not a shell was taken from the beds that was not taken by a practiced hand.

The company was on the Island of Tahiti a little over four months. The picture was on film and the R.M.S. "MAKURA" sailed from Papeete at 6:08 a.m. on the morning of April 3, 1928, with Van Dyke and his crew. One cameraman remained an additional month for atmosphere and background shots.

While Van Dyke and his gang were at Tahiti, Al Jolson made the first all-talking movie and there was much arguing among Woody's crew as to the possibilities of sound movies. Upon returning to the U.S.A., Van discovered that the people at home had gone all out for this new talkie film idea. Louis B. Mayer decided to add some sound effects . . . bird calls, etc. . . . to "White Shadows." They were dubbed in at the studio and a tag was also added to the picture. It was a talkie shot of Van Dyke addressing the audience in the theatre. He acknowledged each member of the crew by name and gave them credit for a splendid job in successfully completing the film. A tremendous publicity campaign was put in back of "White Shadows in the South Seas" and elaborate plans made for a Hollywood Premiere at Grauman's Chinese Theatre.

Chapter 18

THE INNER CIRCLE

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The Inner Circle

A huge crowd thronged the streets in front of Grauman's Chinese Theatre in Hollywood. Lights, celebrities, excitement. All were there! This was an important night for both Van Dyke and his mother. They had arrived early and Woody was backstage checking up on the program that was to follow the screening of his film. A long line of big black limousines drove up to the red carpeted runway. The occupants were introduced in the outer lobby of the theatre and asked to say a few words into a microphone.

"I know the picture will be a thrill!"

"Oh, it's all so exciting!"

"I'm sure it will be a delightful evening!"

"What a crowd!"

"Charmed, indeed!"

"What a night, and oh, so many lovely people!"

This went on for some time, and then a roar went up from the crowd. Another black limousine had just pulled up to the theatre. A big smiling Irishman, in white bow tie and tails, stepped out of his car. It was Tim McCoy. He never wore his ten-gallon hat or spurs except when on the screen or at home on his ranch in Wyoming. His fans gave him a tremendous ovation. He acknowledged their cheers, but it was obvious his Irish was ruffled. Before leaving his hotel for the theatre he had been reading the notices in the daily papers about the big Premiere and had seen everybody's name in big print but that of the fellow who made the picture. Crossing the lobby of the theatre, he noticed a poster with the director's name in tiny letters at the extreme base of the ad. The Master of Ceremonies asked him to say a few words to the radio audience. That he certainly did. He took the mike completely away from the M.C. and started to speak. "I know we're going to see a great picture tonight, for I know the man who made it. He directed most of my best pictures, and I know how he works. Whatever he sets his hand to do has got to be good, or it won't be on film. You don't know who I'm talking about because his name wasn't even mentioned in the papers today." Turning his back on the M.C., who was trying to take the mike away from him, McCoy continued, "So, I'm going to tell you who he is. His name is W. S. Van Dyke, and you're going to hear a lot about this director from this night on. Mark my word!" With that, Tim McCoy turned and gave the mike back to the astonished Master of Ceremonies. Tim got a couple of angry glances from some of the staff, but with the Irish in him satisfied, he smiled at them and went into the theatre.

By a strange coincidence the people in the theatre heard the great D. W. Griffith say almost the very same thing, in substance at least, when he introduced Van Dyke to the audience at the conclusion of the Premiere. Mr. Griffith had flown out from New York to pay his respects to the young man who had started his movie career with him in his film, "Intolerance." In his remarks, Mr. Griffith said, " 'White Shadows in the South Seas' is a work of art and Woody Van Dyke is the artist who brought it into being." He also told those present he had always known this young man would be a great director some day!

The film received a tremendous ovation from press and public alike and won the award for that year. W. S. Van Dyke had cracked Hollywood's "Inner Circle."

As quickly as he could get away from the crowd in the theatre, Woody grabbed his mother by the arm and they headed for home. As the car sped away from the lights and the excitement of the premiere, Woody slipped a little package into the palm of her hand. She opened it. "Oh, Van, it's beautiful!" It was a lovely platinum wrist watch, and on the back was inscribed — "The alpha and omega of my affections — my mother."

Chapter 19

A CELEBRITY OVERNIGHT

CHAPTER NINETEEN

A Celebrity Overnight

For years Van Dyke had roared through the Hollywood scene unnoticed. Then, through a break, he brought back a picture from Tahiti, "White Shadows in the South Seas."

Hollywood was agog over the dynamic director who had burst the big time like a bombshell with a new type of adventure film.

Said Alva Johnson in a New Yorker thumbnail sketch: "He has a knuckle-dented profile and the nose with the counter-clockwise trend."

Said another paper: "His hair is cropped an inch from his scalp and looks something like a wire brush. Six feet tall, all bone and muscle, clear steel blue eyes that look right through you, and a quick graceful step."

And another: "His build and carriage are a cross between cowboy and U.S. Marine — long and lean, yet tough and soldierly."

Van Dyke was a celebrity over night. The Explorers' Club invited him to lecture. The Adventurers' Club made him a member. The studio began looking for another tale of far-flung adventure, and found it.

In the fall of 1928 Van Dyke's gang were again Tahiti bound. This time the story was "The Pagan." Ramon Navarro and Renee Adoree were the stars. But there was a great difference in this trip. The crew, having made the trip before, knew the problems they were up against and they sailed through the assignment. Van had promised to have Navarro back in the States by Christmas to meet a contractual commitment. In order to do this he planned on a shooting schedule of thirty days on the island. Everybody thought he was crazy for he had been four months in Tahiti on "White Shadows." But Van had worked out this picture from the start and had actually figured on shooting all of the island scenes in two weeks so he could spend the balance of the time in touring the South Seas. There were many things about these Society Islands and the people on them that he wanted to know. Bad weather, however, took up most of the thirty days shooting so he didn't have the free time he had hoped for. But he had learned much about the islands in his five months on them. Van had read a lot of books about the South Seas written by people who had never seen them. He said, "I think people who haven't been to the islands had better leave the romance out and write just the poetry about them. You can't see what a valley is like until you climb a mountain, and you don't know what a mountain looks like until you get down into the valley." Van Dyke had been in the valley. He had asked questions about the aid civilization had brought to these people and was convinced it wasn't much. Somebody said to him, "But the missionaries? They stopped their being cannibals." Van Dyke came back with, "Stopped 'em, my eye! Those people didn't have meat in the old days — and every red-blooded race wants meat. When people are on an island without meat, and the craving for meat comes, they get it. You call them cannibals! Preaching didn't stop them being cannibals. The traders stopped them when they brought in canned meat and stocked the islands with hogs."

Despite the bad weather and difficulties on this trip, there were good days — as the cast knew when they again began to find land crabs in their beds. They learned it was wise to search their rooms at night before turning in.

Donald Crisp, famous movie character actor, nearly lost his life in this picture. They were shooting a scene that called for a shark to attack a group while spearing fish in the sea. The shark, the company was told, hits hard and fast. If a swimmer is attacked, he disappears instantly. To make it possible to give this illusion and disappear quickly in the water, Donald Crisp rigged a couple of heavy calibre shell casements to his legs. These, of course, couldn't be seen while he was standing in water up to his shoulders. The idea was to step into a hole when they made the shot. But before they were ready, Donald accidentally stepped off into deep water and disappeared like a block of cement. The weight of the heavy brass casings plunged him to the bottom. A couple of husky native swimmers saw him go down and rushed to his aid or it would have been all over for Donald Crisp. In fact, he disappeared so fast the swimmers thought he had actually been attacked by a shark. Van insisted that in the future all devices be thoroughly tested before another such incident might occur.

"The Pagan" was Woody's first all-talkie, and presented a musical theme featuring a number, "The Pagan Love Song," that swept the nation with its popularity.

Upon his arrival home, Woody was asked to address the Press Club. A member asked him about the romance and poetic lure of the islands. In Van Dyke's typical manner of evading certain issues if he so desired, he replied, "I guess the only man who ever really saw the romance and poetic lure of the islands while living on them was Robert Louis Stevenson. Too bad you can't ask him!"

Chapter 20

HORNING INTO AFRICA

CHAPTER TWENTY

Horning Into Africa

"Trader Horn" was the book sensation of the day. . . . Why not send Van Dyke to Africa to make it?

"That's a fantastic idea," said Van Dyke. "Nobody but an adventurer could even dream of such a thing; no one but a goof would try it; and no one but a clown could get away with it."

Woody had never been to Africa. In fact, he hadn't even read much about it other than for his own amusement as a kid. And all those stories were about dark jungles, wild animals and head-hunting cannibals.

The more the studio executives talked about the idea, the more interested they became. In their discussions it was learned that the largest safari to enter Africa had been that of Prince Edward. This party had not been under way many days when His Royal Highness was called home because of the illness of his father, King George. But even though the trip was shortened, it was considered remarkable that the White Hunters in charge of the group had maneuvered such a large party over several miles of Africa without a casualty and with no one dying from fever. That interested Van Dyke. He asked, "How many people were in that safari?"

"About a dozen whites and fifty blacks."

"And how much equipment?" Van asked.

"Ten or twelve cars and seven or eight tons of equipment."

"Humph," said Van Dyke. "We'd have to take two or three dozen whites, a couple of hundred blacks, at least twenty-five or thirty cars in addition to a generator truck, sound wagons and possibly ninety tons of equipment."

"Nobody could ever take that many people and so much stuff into Africa and get away with it," said an executive. Van Dyke agreed, but the more they talked about it, the more he began to wonder what Africa was really like. He thought about those cannibal stories, the pygmies, lions, elephants, and jungles. After all, it would be a terrific idea actually to shoot a story like "Trader Horn" in Africa itself and bring to audiences throughout the world authentic films of the lives, customs, music and tribal dances of the natives, and the wild animals in their natural haunts.

A skeptic jumped to the floor and said, "Mr. Mayer, it's crazy! You'll never get by with it. The crew would never survive." But Louis B. Mayer was not so sure . . . he had been watching Van Dyke's reactions. He handed Woody a manuscript — "It's a story outline for screen adaptation of the book 'Trader Horn' . . . see what you think of it, Van, and give me a report in a few days!"

The very first lines caught Van Dyke's fancy . . . "Tradin' rivers where no white man has been before!" The plot of the film play was based on Horn's own narrative as told in the book, and had to do with a story about the natives where a White Goddess supposedly ruled a vicious tribe of Asordies in the territory beyond the "Apango Falls." As he read, Van became more interested. A Missionary woman, Mrs. Kent, believed the White Goddess to be her daughter, who, with her father, had been lost in the jungle many years before. The father's body had been found, but no trace of the girl. The star of the film, Alfred Aloysius Horn — better known as 'Trader Horn' has been a friend of the Kents for many years and greatly respects the Missionary woman's courage. The screen play is to open with 'Trader Horn' and a companion, whom he calls Peru, traveling down a river in the midst of the African jungle in search for native villages to trade salt and trinkets for ivory. Peru is seeing the jungles for the first time, and Horn is telling his young friend about Africa. "When you're not eating somebody, you're trying to keep somebody from eating you! Aye, lad . . . that's Africa!" The white traders come upon a village and are enthusiastically greeted by a friendly tribe. Through Trader Horn's native gun boy, Renchero, the tribesmen are told they come to trade for ivory. During the next scene, while trading, distant drums are heard and all activity stops abruptly. A tenseness comes over the scene as the drums increase in volume. Trader Horn turns to his friend and tells him the drums mean "Ju Ju," and that within twenty-four hours every tribe for hundreds of miles would be on the kill. Trader Horn explains, "God knows where the Ju Ju began, but as long as those drums are beating, every native in these jungles will go crazy. By nightfall some of the black devils will think they have turned into leopards. At dusk they will leap out from the tall grass onto their victim's back, and tear them into shreds." The drums stop . . . there is a moment of silence . . . four savages, hideously smeared with war paint, leap out from the brush. Horn says, "Asordies! The most vicious tribe in Africa." Realizing the seriousness of the situation, Trader Horn quickly orders his gun boy and carriers back to the river. The natives they were trading with and who only a moment before were friendly, now assume an air of indifference and start a weird chant as the white men hurry back to their boat on the river bank. The drums in the distance beat again as Horn and his companion reach the river. Two of their native carriers lay dead in the large canoe, with spears in their backs. There is a tenseness as Trader Horn orders their bodies removed and stands guard with a heavy calibre rifle as Peru and his native boys get aboard so they can start up the river. That night, while camped along the stream, Trader Horn, Peru and Renchero — Horn's gun boy — are awakened by an approaching safari. It is the Missionary woman, Mrs. Kent. Horn asks what she is doing in this territory, especially on the trail that heads for the "Apango Falls." The woman has reliable information that the White Goddess really lives, and she is certain that she must be her lost child. Trader Horn insists that she not make the trip. It is too dangerous! The witch men have put Ju Ju on the drums and by the morrow the tribes will be wild. He further tells her that no white man has ever set foot beyond the Falls, let alone a woman. But the Missionary woman persists, and Trader Horn offers to accompany her. She will not agree, but asks him to promise that if she does not return in two weeks he will take up the search for the white girl. Horn promises, and adds . . . "But just in case the good Lord might be busy with other things, I'll follow you up the river!" In the next scene Trader Horn and his safari find the body of the Missionary woman in the water at the bottom of the Falls. The balance of the film story is to deal with finding the girl . . . rescuing her from the Asordies . . . warding off attacks from other hostile tribes . . . encounters with pygmies . . . wild animal fights . . . all staged midst the treacherous elements of Africa's dark, dank jungles, and equatorial heat.

Mr. Mayer received Van Dyke's report. It included recommendations for certain changes in the screen adaptation, with a note scribbled across the top of the manuscript, "I told you nobody but a goof would try it!"

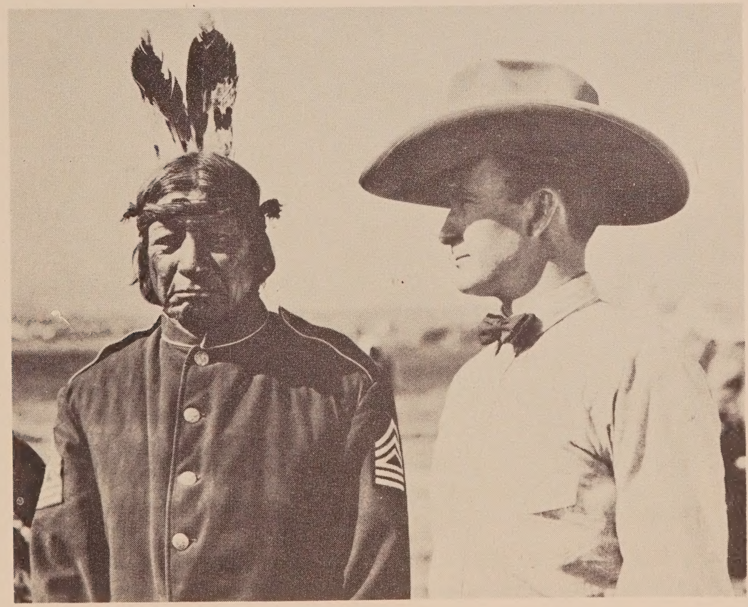
The minute M-G-M's publicity department announced that the studio was sending a company into the dark continent, the mail began to pour in. Almost every "authority" on Africa in the world wrote to the studio executives telling them what to do and what not to do. Van Dyke studied the letters carefully for he admitted he didn't know anything about the place. But, no two letters were alike. He then went to the libraries, but no two books were alike. So he decided to find out about Africa when he got there. But he did, however, contact the Royal Geographic Society in London, who furnished him with much valuable data. He also made arrangements through London representatives to engage as guide Major W.V.D. Dickinson, White Hunter of Nairobi, Kenya Colony, British East Africa. Dickinson was considered one of the best White Hunters in Africa. He was told to engage qualified assistants and to acquire whatever he would need in the way of equipment. This was typical of Van Dyke. He may have referred to himself as a goof and clown, but when he tackled a tough assignment he took no chances and always surrounded himself with the best. He got his same old crew together and started them to work organizing their departments. Among these were Clyde De Vinna and Bob Roberts, first cameramen; Harry Albiez, property man; C. S. Pratt, sound; Nogle, Deverman and McAfee, assistant cameramen; and "Pop" Arnold, grips.

In casting, Harry Carey was assigned the part of Trader Horn; Duncan Renaldo as Little Peru; and Edwina Booth as Nina T., the "White Goddess." Van Dyke told them frankly of the dangers they would have to face and then inquired if they were still willing to go. They all agreed.

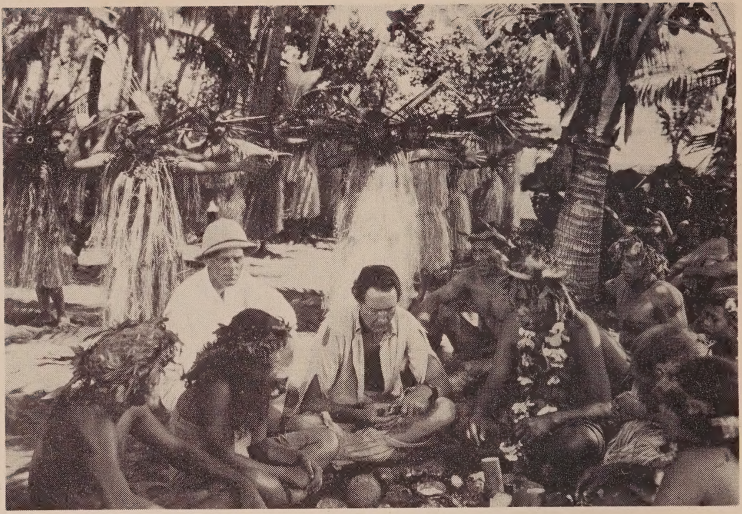
Edwina Booth had been selected through an unusual incident. The qualifications for the part of Nina T. were such that the studio didn't know how they would find a blonde girl to fit the type. Howard Strickling in Publicity framed up a campaign to locate a girl. The director was to make his selection from screen tests. Either Strickling's campaign was too good, or the judges too liberal, for on the day of the screen tests there were about a thousand blondes lined up on the lot. Van Dyke took one look at this gang and told Clyde De Vinna they didn't have enough negative in the studio to make that many tests. Thinking fast, Van said, "We'll take the camera car and pass along the line in front of the girls and you make believe you're filming all of them. When I see one that looks good, I'll give you the high sign and you actually shoot her." De Vinna agreed and they started down the line. Edwina Booth became suspicious and, thinking there was no film in the camera at all, was so mad by the time they got to her that she put on the darndest show Van Dyke had ever seen. He had never been called so many things in so short a space of time. Edwina broke out of the line and started across the lot. Recovering from the shock, Van snapped his fingers, "That's it!" he said. "That's the girl we want! Grab her quick! Don't let her get away! Boy, what a temper!" She was just what he was looking for — a girl who could become so infuriated she would even scratch out the eyes of a cannibal chief.

When preparations for the journey were almost completed, a great and well-known African authority and motion picture man visited the New York offices of the studio and warned the Vice-President of M-G-M not to send into Africa any equipment that weighed over a ton and a half. That didn't sound good to Van Dyke. But he took one look at the gang of roughnecks that constituted his staff and requisitioned a generator truck weighing nine tons; two sound

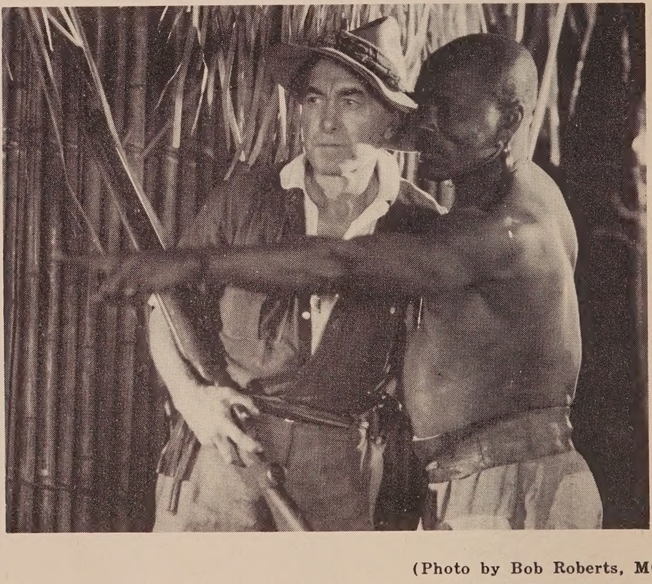
Phil Ford, Laura Winston Van Dyke, and David Butler in a dramatic moment in Louis Burston's "The Milky Way," (David Butler is today one of Hollywood's top directors, and Phil Ford directs Westerns at Republic)



Colonel Tim McCoy looks at his old friend Left Hand, who fought against General Custer at the battle of The Little Big Horn, and later became a scout for General Crook.



Director Woody Van Dyke; Monte Blue, and a group of natives talk over a scene on location in Tahiti for "White Shadows in the South Seas."



(Photo by Bob Roberts, MGM)

Harry Carey, as Trader Horn, with his gun boy Renchero on location in Africa for the picture "Trader Horn," one of Hollywood's greatest thrillers.

trucks weighing seven tons each; twenty-two other trucks, each of which — when loaded, weighed about five tons.

Van Dyke called the entire company together — "We're going into a darned serious and dangerous thing," he said. "All kidding aside, it's going to take the utmost from every man. The only way we can succeed — even get out of it alive — is by organization. There has to be a leader, and it so happens they've picked me for that job. I expect to be implicitly obeyed, for the good of us all. If any one of you has anything to say, say it now. Once we are in Africa, it's a case of obey — without talk or question!"

"We're with you, Van — you know that!" was the spontaneous reply from the gang.

In February of 1929, the first unit shoved off for Africa. They were Clyde De Vinna, head cameraman, a camera crew, and the unit manager, who went on ahead to make test shots for background and other necessary arrangements. Van Dyke and the balance of the company soon followed. There had been a million and one details to look after. Woody left his signature on 5,432 manifold sheets at the warehouse, from which his mobile equipment, properties and supplies had been shipped.

Included in the list of equipment shipped to the seaport of Mambassa, British East Africa, was everything from a ten ton generator truck to a package of safety pins. There was 250,000 feet of negative film in one separate shipment and the crates and boxes tipped the scales at more than twenty-five tons. The United States customs inspectors had sealed every individual box under government bond to expedite transportation.

Van Dyke was aware that once he left an inland base and struck out into the jungle, he would be utterly cut off from the outside world for probably six months. He had shipped safety razor blades, a hundred cases of cigarettes, five cases of tobacco, automatic lighter fluid, tooth paste, sewing kits, shoe repairing equipment, medical supplies, including adrenalin and snakebite antidotes, pistols, rifles, baseball bats, rubber-quoite, ink, handcuffs, flyswatters, thermos bottles, carpenter and plumber tools, fans, smoke pots, insect killing fluids, soap, matches, fire extinguishers, chicken wire, screens, bicycles, portable phonographs, records, flashlights, cheese cloth, ukuleles, crutches, canteens, typewriters, flypaper, catnip, ant paste, coffee, canned milk, lanterns, guitars, mirrors, tents, gasoline, dehydrated foods, stoves, refrigeration plants, elephant guns, and about everything else that his experienced mind visioned as useful.

As head of the company he had assumed the entire responsibility for not only the success of the venture as far as getting the picture on film was concerned, but also for the welfare of the thirty-one people he was taking with him from Hollywood. Each person in the company had to pass a rigid physical examination before he would permit him to sail. Special arrangements were made for the welfare of the three women members of the company — Miss Josephine Chippo, script girl; Edwina Booth, and Mrs. Harry Carey. Inoculations for typhus, tropic fever and poison insects were to be administered in Africa.

To meet any emergency, he had shipped thirty lamps and a hundred and fifty specially-packed incandescent bulbs ranging from 400 to 1,000 watts. A portable laboratory had been constructed so that he could develop his film as he went along in the jungle. Ralph Heintz, noted radio engineer, had built a special portable radio low wave transmitting and receiving station for the company. It was designed after those made for the Southern Cross Flight and the Byrd and Wilkins Expeditions.

Woody was like an old hen with a new brood of chicks. He watched his gang every second of the time. Now that the trip was actually under way he walked the deck of the big ocean liner and thought of the many weird tales he'd been told about Africa and the things he had been warned of by the experts . . . malaria, fever, sun, contaminated water, sleeping sickness, flies, black mambas, green mambas, soldier ants, safari ants, spitting cobras, pythons, wild elephants, rhinos, lions, crocodiles, hyenas, thorn brush that would tear you to shreds, swamps and that sun — torrid heat, HEAT! No roads? No canteens? No hotels? "Who the hell gave birth to this idea, anyway?" he said.

After crossing the Atlantic on the Ile de France, and enjoying a personally conducted sightseeing tour of Paris, the gang arrived in Genoa, Italy. They boarded the "Usarama" and started on the last lap of their journey into Africa. Arriving at Mambassa Harbor, British East Africa, they wasted no time getting organized and headed for Nairobi, where the advance party was headquartered. It was there that Van met his White Hunter. Woody had expected to find a rough, tough, hardy fellow — the kind one might imagine would lead a party into a charging rhino or a pack of wild elephants. But here was a gentleman in golf knickers, highly polished boots and silk shirt. Van rasped, "Are you a White Hunter?" The Englishman said, "Major Dickinson, old chap." Major Dickinson was given orders to engage four more hunters, Stanton, Waller, Barnes and Bowring — three to take charge of the huge camp and two to be constantly with the company to protect them from danger.

Clyde De Vinna, cameraman, who had arrived ahead of the unit, had made several test shots which Van quickly looked at. Woody then took De Vinna and a small group including the White Hunters, and started looking for locations. But just before leaving Nairobi he engaged a doctor to go with the company. The Doc had served a long time in the Indian Army and had been in Africa for a number of years. He had had much experience with natives, fever, sunstroke, dysentery, sleeping sickness, smallpox, plague, cramps and a few other problems apt to be encountered on their trip.

After traveling some five hundred miles farther into Africa, looking for locations, Van's small party stopped off at Kampala, about thirty miles north of Entebbe, the seat of government of the Uganda Protectorate. Van Dyke went to Entebbe to see the Governor, who lived in a beautiful mansion on the shores of Lake Victoria. The Governor was out so Woody left word that a movie company from the U.S.A. was in the area to get certain films and they would appreciate any assistance he could give. Van and the White Hunters then spent two days with officials and natives, going over maps, marking spots where they could get what they were after and laying out a course so that their objectives could be reached in the shortest possible time. They had to select routes that were practical for their equipment. The campaign was mapped out and a time schedule set up with the precision of a military expedition. Van Dyke and his handpicked advance crew then headed farther inland. They stopped at Panyamur, which is on the left bank of the Victoria Nile, directly at its headwaters where it takes off from Lake Albert. There was no town or settlement. It was just a place where the river boat stopped for wood. Natives lived up and down the bank of the river for miles and would occasionally assemble in Panyamur to gather wood. Van's crew used the few grass huts that were already there. He picked Panyamur as one of their future locations and laid out plans for several sets to be built there. That evening while sitting around the campfire, Van Dyke learned that they were directly across from the mouth of the Victoria Nile, but could not go up the river without a permit from the Governor, as it was a tsetse fly area that had been under quarantine some time for sleeping sickness. One of the worst in Africa. That night he also heard his first hyena. It was an eerie, savage cry. He never forgot the feeling that came over him.

Van needed boats for transportation so he had met another Britisher, Commander Buckler, assistant superintendent of the Marine. That part of Africa they were in was under the protectorate of Great Britain and it was Buckler's job to keep his three boats in operation on Lake Albert as well as two river boats and a small launch. Buck, as Van now called him, had become one of the gang. Woody learned that the restricted area was perfect for his needs because, in addition to many animals, there was a falls — the Murchison Falls — just what the picture called for. He asked Buck what would happen if they went into the restricted area to see what was up there, and the Englishman said, "I don't know — let's go and see." Van had Clyde De Vinna radio George Kann, unit manager, at Nairobi, to have the company pack up and go to Kampala and get permission from the Governor of Uganda for the unit to go up into the Murchison Falls restricted area.

The next morning Van, Major Dickinson, Buck and De Vinna started up the Victoria Nile, headed for Murchison Falls. When they first entered the restricted area, Clyde De Vinna cut loose at distance shots of the hippos and crocs with long focal lenses, but soon the animals became so plentiful they paid little or no attention to them, other than to be sure to keep out of their way. Monkeys by the hundreds scampered along the tree tops jabbering and talking, following them up the river. They made camp at a point two miles below the falls at a place called Fajoa, a town in name only with not a human being or habitation for miles around. Van Dyke had seen hippos in the brush and the river, and crocodiles by the hundreds. In fact, he had marveled at how Buck managed to miss them with their boat as they came up the river. There were animals of every description for the area had not been hunted for years. This was what he had come to Africa to get. They didn't go up to the falls as they were in a hurry to get back. They packed up and proceeded down the river to Panyamur before dark. Van said he hadn't the slightest intention of camping on that river bank with crocodiles and hippos as thick as they were there. And, too, he was anxious to get in touch with Kann to see if he had contacted the Governor of Uganda when the company had arrived at Kampala. The unit manager notified Van that he had made contact. The Governor's own words were, "Van Dyke, if you want to take your company up to Murchison Falls you may do so. None of your people live in this colony and on your return you must get out of this colony so that if you have contracted the disease you cannot spread it. The blacks you brought up from Kenya and Tanganyika territories you may take along also, but I will not permit one man, woman, child or animal to go up into that district from this colony."

Van Dyke said, "You don't suppose anyone would be damn fool enough to go up into such a place after a warning like that!" After all, to risk the lives of two hundred and twenty-seven people just for the sake of a few cockeyed scenes in a motion picture didn't make sense. Yet, here's what they came after. So he went to Kampala, got the company together and explained the circumstances frankly. They voted one hundred percent to go. Woody always said afterward that they were all sick with malaria at the time and consequently a trifle crazy, which was the only reason they decided to go. Van assumed all responsibility for the group and got the necessary release from the Governor. He gave orders for the unit to pack up and move to Butiaba. This spot was a beautiful little harbor. It's name was merely the way the natives said "beautiful harbor" . . . "Buti — aba."

The unit then moved to Rhino Camp, a little spot on the White Nile, only a steamboat landing from which one starts the trek into the Belgian Congo. They made headquarters here. This spot obtained its name from the fact that it is the feeding ground of a rather large herd of white rhinos, thoroughly protected from slaughter by the government. Van Dyke was told that a man by the name of White had discovered the animal and named it after himself, although it is as black as the other rhinos. The only difference between white and black rhinos is the fact that white rhinos are apparently not so vicious, have a squarer head, and a much longer and narrower set of horns. Woody also discovered that the rhino horn is not of bone structure. It is formed of the congealed hair, as hard as ivory, and is not attached to the bone of the skull in any way but grows out of the skin. It is worth more money than ivory.

It was at Rhino Camp that Van shot his first African game, a nice big specimen of hartebeest. The animal was shot eleven times before it was brought to earth. It was here also that the gang talked Van into shooting his big elephant gun for the first time. He pulled it up to his shoulder, braced the stock firmly against his chin. It kicked so hard it knocked his hat a foot in the air, almost dislocated his shoulder, broke the stock of the gun and gave him a nosebleed.

Rhino Camp was also well suited for a second river sequence in the picture, so plans were made to build additional sets there. While these plans and orders were being carried out, Van and another scouting party went high-tailing it for the Belgian Congo looking for additional locations and animals. They found plenty. They stopped at Aura; then to a small Belgian town, Aru; to Faraje, Beni where they found pygmies to be used later in the picture; then to the Luberi district and the Mountains of the Moon, which was selected for the cliff sequences. On their right looking south was the huge Iture Forest covering an area as large as several of our states — dank, dark and mysterious. On the left, towering to an elevation of sixteen thousand feet, was Mount Margherita. The Mountains of the Moon still represent unexplored Africa. Satisfied with the locations he had found for future shots, Van and his group doubled back to meet the company and get to work. Through the government radio station at Beni he radioed Buckler to have boats ready for the trip up the Nile and also wired the unit manager at Rhino Camp to move the entire company and all equipment back to Butiaba where they would all embark by boat for Panyamur to start their journey into the Murchison Falls restricted area.

Arriving at Panyamur, they began shooting immediately and had a taste of the hell and high water they were to catch all the way along the route. "Carting a movie troupe around Africa may have its romantic side," said Van Dyke, "but I'll be damned if I'm going around on that side of it to find out." After shooting the local scenes he wanted at Panyamur, Van gave orders to break camp and the much feared trek up the Victoria Nile to the Murchison Falls was under way. The entire group started on this leg of their journey into the tsetse fly-sleeping sickness area as happy as a prisoner on his last mile. The next night they were encamped a couple of miles below the falls at Fajoa, the spot Van had selected on his reconnaissance tour.

Everybody had worked hard and Woody knew several of the men, including himself, wanted to do a little hunting, so he let them organize in small groups and see what they could find. He told them to go downstream several miles so they wouldn't frighten the animals in the area they were to photograph. Van personally wanted to bag a crocodile because he didn't like their general appearance or manners. He took his gun boy, Riano, and started downstream. They found a good spot, tied up the boat and started hunting. After walking a short distance, Riano tapped Van on the shoulder and whispered, "Buffalo!" He was pointing directly ahead. At the moment, Van Dyke was ready to leave Africa. He carried a small high-powered sporting rifle (since the elephant gun kicked him in the nose) and the gun boy was trying to shove the elephant gun into his hands. He couldn't shoot both of them at once. He should have exchanged the smaller rifle for the elephant gun, but at the moment he was too busy trying to figure out what that was directly ahead of him. It looked like a huge dark mass with a spread of horns, one tip stuck in the middle of Cape Town and the other prodding the boot of Italy. Van Dyke was glued to the spot. He couldn't even lift his feet off the ground. There, not fifty feet away, looking straight at him, was the most dangerous beast in Africa, the cape buffalo. It seemed foolish for both the buffalo and Van to stand there glowering at each other so Woody catapulted his small gun to his shoulder. It seemed like eternity before he could even locate the sights and when he did his finger accidentally touched the trigger. The moment the smaller gun exploded he decided he should have used the elephant gun and almost knocked his gun boy down jerking the bigger gun away from him. The force of the 218 semi-soft nose shell of the small high-powered rifle had thrown the monster slightly off his feet but he got his bearing in seconds and thundered by Van Dyke like a ten-ton truck. The first shock over, he raised the elephant gun and threw another shot after him. The beast fell about fifty yards away — but got up and paced off three miles before finally dropping dead. Van said he wanted to take the horns home because he thought they would make a nice fence around his yard. A few days later he got another buffalo. The 577 cordite shell of the elephant gun lifted this fellow into the air and laid him at Van's feet.

Before going into Africa, Woody had been told that the hippo was as harmless as a pig . . . just a huge wild hog. But while camped up the Nile he found them very different. He was told by one of his White Hunters about six people who had come from America to set a record by crossing Africa without a gun, shooting all of the big game with cameras only. The first thing they ran into was the hippo. They hadn't been shooting long before one old bull charged out of the water, seized a native camp boy in his mouth, raced to the edge of the river and stamped him into Africa. So thorough a job did that hippo do that it was impossible to tell where the boy left off and the African soil started. They had given up the rest of the trip and gone home.

Van Dyke's own experiences convinced him it was wise to leave them alone. In the water they are mean and terribly vicious. Van said he would no sooner think of riding up the Victoria Nile in a canoe than he would think of jumping out of an airplane without a parachute.

The company now settled down to work. They were well rewarded for going into the restricted territory for even the White Hunters said they had never seen so many animals. Not having heard a hunter's gun for years, the animals were not afraid. At times, expressions of curiosity could be seen on their faces. Van said, "The people at home will never believe we made these pictures in the jungle." He didn't know how true that statement would prove to be.

The Murchison Falls was one of the most awe-inspiring sights the gang had ever seen. The entire waters of the Victoria Nile narrow down from a width of about two hundred yards to roar through a gap of solid granite only fifteen feet wide and plunge two hundred feet below where the river continues on its second level. The roar of the falls can be heard for miles. Van wanted a road cut through the brush to get to the area at the bottom of the falls as he had a scene that called for a shot down there and, too, the place was teeming with crocodiles because of the dead fish killed by the terrific force of the water through the narrow gorge. The local authorities informed him it would take their engineers several weeks to build such a road and would cost several hundred pounds.

With two hundred and twenty-seven people camped in the heart of the tsetse fly area one doesn't wait weeks to get a road built. Van Dyke told his own "engineering crew" what the local authorities had said. In two days, and at a cost of sixty bucks, a passable roadway was in use. The British were now agreeing with the natives that these Yankees were really crazy.

It was customary, when making camp, to build fires on the outskirts to keep wild game away. However, when they were staking out water holes to photograph animals, Van Dyke would not permit fires. They would camp overnight near the water holes and wait for the animals to come and drink in the morning. One night a four-legged animal went sailing through a crew member's tent and he let out a war whoop that would have frightened a hyena. Another tent crashed down and another scream. Then a third tent and a volley of shots rang out. They all swore it was a horrible beast with great white teeth and flaming red eyes. The next morning Van Dyke found a dead sheep with a bullet in its head in the brush nearby. Even though all this commotion had been caused by only a little sheep, none of the crew assigned to water hole details ever got sleepy after that.

An important scene in the story to be filmed in this area was the one that called for Harry Carey and Renchero, his gun boy, to leap across a croc-infested stream while escaping from "cannibals." There were plenty of crocodiles there all right, but no living being, not even Tarzan, could leap across the Victoria Nile. Van had a quick consultation with his engineers and an artificial stream bed was made close to the river bank. An island was built in the middle of the moat and then an inlet out into the river so that it would fill up with water. This was a fine bit of engineering as far as they'd gone, but what about the crocs? One doesn't stand on the bank of the Victoria Nile and say, "Here, crockie! Here, crockie!" and expect to get anywhere. Major Dickinson suggested killing some hippopotamus, or other, smaller animals, throwing their carcasses into the moat and letting the sun do the rest. After three days Van said that if those carcasses smelled good to a crocodile he wished he were a crocodile if he had to stay there much longer. But the scheme worked. The crocs came, dozens of them, and fell for the trap. The minute they got up into the artificial stream bed far enough, the gang quickly placed barriers across the inlet, cutting them off from the river. The barrier was fine. There was only one thing wrong. The crew didn't know the wallop a crocodile packs in his tail and crocodiles eighteen feet long are not alligators. The minute that bunch of wild, ornery critters had eaten all of the carcasses, they turned and headed for the river. "Look out!" Van yelled as he saw them coming. With a series of left and right blows, their mighty tails knocked the barrier into shreds and in a matter of seconds they were lazily swimming up the Victoria Nile. Van Dyke threw his hat down on the ground. "How do you like that!" he said. After ten days struggling, sweating and swearing to concoct his homemade set . . . inhaling that horrible stench . . . and then to see the crocs demolish it in seconds! This was another one of the times when Woody and every member of his crew wondered what takes place in a guy's mind to dream up a trip like this — send a gang of people to an out-of-the-way spot like this to get a shot of a bunch of crocodiles just so some movie fan could walk out of a theatre and say, "Ah, it was all staged, and I bet they never went to Africa at all!"

The hunters shot some more hippopotamus and started the procedure all over again. This time, however, Van Dyke's "engineers" built a miniature gate that would have closed off the Panama Canal. It worked. They corralled two hundred crocodiles. If Van Dyke had filmed this "battle of the crocs" it would have stolen the show. To keep them from getting out of the pen, a twenty-four hour watch was posted. The crews changed shifts every four hours. In addition to clubs and heavy calibre guns they prepared torches with which to drive the beasts back if they should rush the gate. These torches consisted of burlap bags soaked in oil and wound around the ends of long bamboo poles. The idea was to ignite the burlap and ram the flaming bags down the crocs' throats if they charged. The first rush came at two A.M. It reminded Van Dyke of the stories he had read as a kid about knights of old running their lances down dragons' throats. The crocs snatched the torches off the ends of the poles and chewed them up like nice juicy steaks, coming back for more. The gang managed to hold the fort and drove them back with yells, clubs, bamboo poles and a few heavy steel shells. The next day was cloudy and they couldn't photograph so had to keep the crocs penned up for another night. This night was the worst of all. By this time the beasts were vicious, and charged several times. The gates held but Van had to kill three of them. The following day the battle went on. The tail of one croc blasted through the fence and caught Harry Carey on the leg, laying him up for a week. Another croc dislodged some sandbags which served as a dam at the lower end of the moat. Duncan Renaldo crawled inside to attempt repairs while diminutive Harry Albiez held one of the beasts at bay. Albiez was on one end of a large pole while the other end was stuffed down the croc's throat. The croc was shaking Harry like a Mixmaster with Harry yodeling to Renaldo to hurry up. Renaldo got out all right but Harry wouldn't drop the pole. Van Dyke yelled, "Let go, you fool!" but Albiez wouldn't let go. "This is a prop and has to be used in the picture. Damned if I'll find another one." It cost Van Dyke four shells to save the pole as well as his property man before the croc shook him to death.

Despite the tension of such incidents and circumstances, the gang had to have their fun for relaxation. To get to this homemade croc pen at night, it was necessary to follow a dark narrow trail for about a mile along the bank of the Nile to the barricade. It required plenty of what it takes to make that mile after dark. All along the way one could hear the splashes of crocodiles as they slid in and out of the river. No person, even one in his right mind, could make that trip without imagining that a big croc was always right behind to snap his breeches off. It wasn't wise to run, either, even when the urge to do so came, because a fellow was apt to bump into a crocodile coming down the trail. The best procedure was to take it kind of slow, and let the light from the lantern frighten them away and clear the path.

Once, while changing the shift at midnight, somebody let out a screech from the trail that took another ten years off the lives of the already rapidly aging crew. That is — all except the crazy goofs who had put the rubber croc — a large, full-scale prop that had been brought from the studio for close-up shots — in the middle of the path just before change of shifts. Van Dyke immediately issued orders that henceforth the rubber croc was to be used for photographic purposes ONLY.

The gang was well rewarded for their hard work. The scene of the escape from the "cannibals" across the crocodile-infested waters was a great success, although it almost cost Harry Carey a leg. Carey and Renchero had to swing across the moat hanging onto long vines, a la Tarzan. The crocs snapping at their feet were not rubber and neither were they stuffed. Certainly the action was staged, but those vicious reptiles were the same bunch of roughnecks Van Dyke's gang had been fighting for days to corral in their home-made "studio set." The Murchison Falls sequence was one for Ripley, for despite the tsetse fly-sleeping sickness quarantine, the crocs and many other hazards, the gang came out of it without a serious casualty. There were however, some cases of malaria and fever, plus a few close calls but when the company reported back to Rhino Camp and counted noses they were all there and still vertical.

Van Dyke took a deep breath and was glad that portion of the story was on film. Now his attention turned to rhinos. The script called for a rhino to charge Harry Carey and Duncan Renaldo. As was his custom, Van didn't ask anyone in his cast to do anything he himself wouldn't do. Therefore, he and Major Dickinson dressed themselves in Harry Carey's and Duncan Renaldo's clothes and started looking for rhinos. Bob Roberts and Dale Deverman, cameramen, accompanied them, with Stanton, another White Hunter, who was to cover them from the camera car. The camera car had been specially built for this type of work. A hole had been cut through the top so that the camera protruded like a gun turret on a tank. One cameraman could stand inside the truck and sweep a complete 360 degree arc with his lens while the other cameraman rode under the carriage of the truck with a hand camera to catch various angles and action of running shots while pacing wild game.

The rhinoceros, almost blind, relies entirely on his keen sense of smell and despite his enormous size can outrun any man. He has few friends even in the animal world because his disposition is as ugly as his looks and his hide so tough that not even the animals consider him good eating. Woody had heard rhinos could run fast and he was hoping they could pace one with the speedometer of the camera car while getting him on film. They didn't have to wait long.

A big fellow, apparently frightened by the automobile, thundered across their path. They turned the car and followed him and the speedometer registered thirty-five miles per hour. Van said, "Not bad for a couple of tons of dynamite." They soon found another actor, a huge ugly looking beast, standing under the shade of a tree in the brush. Van Dyke and Major Dickinson — as "Carey" and "Renaldo" — got out of the car and gave instructions to cameramen Roberts and Deverman to catch whatever action took place, particularly trying to get a shot of their backs as they faced the rhino. They cautiously approached the monster, keeping into the wind so he wouldn't scent them. Van was thinking about what Dickinson had told him when briefing this whole affair. He had warned that if they got into trouble, the safest place to hit the rhino was in either of his front legs. Because of his extreme weight he can't run on three legs. Van had goose pimples from the top of his head to his toes. Everything was going well — that is, everything on Van's side of the picture — but Mr. Rhino didn't want to play. He completely ignored them. Woody and Dickinson started to jump up and down and yell at him, but still Mr. Rhino wouldn't move.

Van said, "He's asleep" but just then the beast snorted and started to paw the ground. Van grabbed his gun and was trying to figure out which leg to hit when, looking down the sights, he saw Mr. Rhino turn and lumber off into the brush. "How do you like that!" Woody said, "Here we are, stalking one of the most ferocious of African beasts and the horn-nosed baboon walks off the set!"

Disgusted, they walked back to the camera car, climbed aboard and Van drove in the general direction in which the African John Barrymore had made his exit. He didn't have to go far, possibly four hundred yards, when there on the other side of the brush, standing in the middle of a dry soda lake, was the same Mr. Rhino. He now seemed a bit more interested. Good fortune was playing along with Van Dyke this time for here was what he wanted. The dry soda lake had a hard surface that was perfect for a running shot. They got as close to the rhino as possible with the car, and then Van gave his crew instructions again. Stanton, the second White Hunter, was perched on top of the camera car with a heavy calibre rifle just in case.

Van Dyke had turned the car around. The plan was to get the rhino to charge them and then Van and Dickinson would race to the car, jump on board and take off while Roberts and Deverman photographed the monster chasing them. This was all good planning if Mr. Rhino would only do what they wanted him to do. The truck was in position. The cameraman had Van and Dickinson in range of their cameras with the rhino in the background. Stanton, on top of the car, had his eyes on the situation, ready for any emergency, when suddenly the wind shifted. When a rhino winds a human he wastes no time, even though almost blind. He snorted and started up like a freight engine. An unexpected action shot was really in progress. Bob Roberts and

Dale Deverman started the cameras grinding, Stanton on top of the truck was about to cover when Dickinson quickly raised his gun and fired. A bull's eye — right into Mr. Rhino's right front leg. The big beast stumbled! Then, contrary to everything Dickinson had told Van Dyke, he got up and started charging like an express train on all four legs. Tough, and how! That was too much, even for Dickinson. Van yelled for his gun and the excited gun boy handed him his field glasses. They all turned and made a mad dash for the truck. Woody was screaming to Roberts to keep the cameras going and pace him when they got the truck under way. They reached the car. Van jumped on the starter and his right foot nearly went through the floor boards as he stepped on the gas and then let out the clutch. No automobile ever got a start like that one. The wheels spun . . . it fairly leaped into space, literally flip-flopping White Hunter Stanton off the top of the car and landing him squarely alongside the rhino, who was about to hook his horns into the bottom of the chassis. Van Dyke swung the automobile around in time to see Stanton streaking across the soda lake with Mr. Rhino in pursuit. Dickinson finished the scene with a quick bullet through the rhino's ear, thus ending the rhino's short but exciting movie career. Upon going back to the spot where they threw Stanton off the car, they could see a trough in the ground where the White Hunter had taken off the minute he landed. Apparently he appraised the situation before he fell and his feet had started a Donald Duck buzzsaw take-off while in mid-air. After this experience, both White Hunters agreed that just plain hunting wild game in Africa was much safer.

The company had many interesting experiences with the natives. Phonographs and flashlights were used to barter with them, but those turned out to be liabilities. The used-to-be cannibals turned the flashlights on, never shutting them off, and when the light went out they'd throw them away and want some more flashlights. The same experience was had with phonographs. They played them continuously until they ran down and then broke them into pieces. One day the natives all quit. Van Dyke couldn't figure out what was the matter so he called in his interpreter. After much persuasion the interpreter found what the trouble was. In order to provide the proper effect for the Ju Ju dance, the studio had made several papier maché skulls. These skulls had been stacked in a tent and some of the natives happened to find them. They had never seen an imitation skull before and thought the white men were killing natives from some other tribe and throwing their bodies to the crocodiles in order to get so many skulls. It took some tall and fancy explaining before they could calm them down and get them back to work. And just about the time they got organized, some poor black grabbed a hot wire and they all made a beeline off the set again. They were not easy to handle and kept Van Dyke and the crew busy.

Not all of Van's trouble was with the natives. He had his problems with his own crew. One of the white men got drunk one time and was handing out liquor to the blacks. Van Dyke ordered him to his quarters. He refused to go and became abusive. "It's you or me right now," said Van Dyke, as he pulled off his coat. They clashed and it was quite a fight. Van finally knocked the fellow out and had him carried to his tent. The next day the man apologized and subsequently the two men became loyal friends.

Woody tried to learn how to speak the native language so he could assist in directing them. He could say "pasi" (hurry up) or "b-wana" (sir) to a tribal chief. He drank "moco" (coffee) and lived in an "Igmoo" (house). He "umgowah" (got down) from high trees to shoot pictures of "mahawoni" (elephants).

While working with the pygmies, Van nearly lost his property man. The pygmies are inquisitive little fellows and they constantly followed the crew around. Harry Albiez was the smallest in size of Van's crew. The pygmies apparently figured he was the nearest like them so Harry drew more than anyone else. Albiez was trying to find a prop stowed away in an old trunk that was loaded in the back deck of a property truck. Harry had his head down inside the trunk looking for whatever he was after. A curious bunch of pygmies had gathered around the rear of the truck to watch this funny little man stick his head down into the "big box." Harry was having trouble, as who doesn't, in trying to find something in an old trunk. It's always on the bottom of the darned thing. To aid in his search, he started to pile stuff on the open top of the trunk. While digging, he found an old mask — a horrible looking thing that had been made at the studio for some weird medicine man dance. Harry slipped it on so that the face was on the back of his head. When he popped up out of the trunk the pygmies dashed all over the place. But the chief and two or more courageous little fellows stood their ground. Their sense of humor was not up to Harry's — they thought some kind of witchcraft had come upon their little friend. Van Dyke just happened along in time to yell to Harry to duck. The pygmies already had their blow pipes to their mouths and were going to dispose of the evil spirit with their poison darts. These weapons are the pygmies' favorite means of protection and they had refused to give up possession of them when they joined the company. Another few seconds and Harry might have been the unhappy possessor of half a dozen poison darts. After being scared nearly to death by Van Dyke for this foolish stunt, as well as by the thought of the darts, Albiez settled down again for at least another hour or so.

Van wanted to make some night shots with the pygmies so put out the usual call. The crew was busily engaged hooking up the generator and big lights, and the pygmies were eyeing the activity with great interest. It was almost dark and the cast was beginning to assemble for work. In twenty minutes it was pitch black and the electrician started the generator to test the lights. The pygmies seemed a trifle uneasy at the sight and sound of the big generator. The interpreter assured them everything was all right, but just then the operator kicked the switch on to test the lights and in a flash the dark jungle was as bright as day. The big lights spit and sputtered as the electrical contact was made. That was too much for the pygmies. They disappeared into the brush and it took three days to find them. After much explanation and persuasion they came back to the camp, but not for night shots.

One of the most thrilling sequences in the picture was to be the Ju Ju scene during which the natives stage a ceremonial dance. In the script the young warriors are worked up to such a frenzied pitch they believe themselves to be leopards and kill some less inspired fellow, thereby proving their qualifications to become regular warriors in the tribe. The unit arrived at the camp where they were to stage this sequence. En route, Van and Edwina had bagged a lion. The old chief, upon hearing about the lion, wanted to put on a show for them after supper. Van thought this would be okay. Early that evening they all went over to the native village and seated themselves on the ground in front of the chief's hut. The ceremony began. Woody found out that Hollywood wasn't the only place where people knew how to put on a show. There were hundreds of big black tribesmen in war paint, plumed headgear, necklaces, bracelets, bells, spears and shields — full dress. The beating of the drums broke the silence. There was a weird, shrill, blood-curdling shriek and the dance was on. This was the first time Van Dyke and the members of his staff had seen one of those dances and they didn't know that frequently some of the blacks went berserk and got out of control. The beating of the drums became louder. The tempo varied from one mood to another with the dancers always surging closer to Van and his party. The noise of the drums increased in volume as the men beat them furiously. The atmosphere became tense and exciting. The natives around Van and his party now joined in with the weird chants and started to beat time to the tom-toms with their hands and feet. Though it was all a show for Van's benefit, there was an uncanny feeling of realism about the whole thing that sent a cold chill down his spine. He had heard about these ceremonial dances and Ju Ju's, and that the leopard murders were still occurring despite every effort of the local authorities to stop them. A sense of fear now came over him and the entire party. The natives seemed crazed and the dance reached fever pitch. They kept surging closer and closer, shrieking and jumping up and down, shaking their spears over their heads. Van didn't like the looks of things. After all, they were in the jungle, many miles from civilization, and these blacks outnumbered his crew many times over. The dance now reached its peak and the scene was one that would make any white man's blood turn to ice. Suddenly, amid high-pitched screams and confusion, the used-to-be cannibals, hundreds of them, broke ranks and made a wild dash across the grass. Some of the blacks started knocking down other tribesmen with war clubs. They grabbed Van Dyke, Edwina Booth and Mrs. Carey, picked them up in their arms, carrying them across the meadow, yelling and jumping up and down.

When it was all over and they hadn't been boiled in a big black pot of oil, Woody admitted it was one of the three or four times while in Africa that he was really scared, and scared plenty. Neither Mrs. Carey nor Edwina Booth could stand the sound of those drums after that. The natives in reality were just putting on a good show for the "boss white man." But what had fooled Van was, when he saw some of the blacks knocking down other blacks with small bats, he thought it was the real thing and wanted to get out of there quick. Actually, this was the native way of taking care of the more frenzied members of the tribe. If a fellow went berserk, they just knocked him out. Even so, Van Dyke never again let them put on a show for the benefit of himself or any of his company.

Among their many serious problems was that of getting water to drink. Often the only water available was that of a water hole used by the animals. Even boiling it wouldn't kill the stench. This caused as much illness among the crew as anything they encountered. Just the thought made several members of the gang sick. After all, they were not seasoned to this kind of life and it was plenty rough even for a veteran explorer to take. The gang swore they'd be tasting quinine for the rest of their lives.

After dodging tsetse flies, malaria mosquitoes, scorpions and centipedes for several months, the entire crew became allergic to anything that looked like a bug. The "army ants," for instance, don't sting like an ordinary ant, they just bite out a piece of flesh and eat it. These creatures are but one of the reasons why bones are never found lying on the ground in Africa. The army ant consumes anything that taints of flesh that comes in its path. They travel by the tens of thousands. The only way Van Dyke's crew could stop them was with a blow torch. One night the camp was awakened by the horrifying screams of Major Dickinson. The army ants had eaten the stock off his gun, the sheets on his bed and had started to consume his pajamas. Several hectic moments followed in driving them out of the tent and saving what was left of his apparel. The "safari ants" were not dangerous. They eat only termites. It was always a good idea to check shoes before putting them on to be sure there wasn't a scorpion inside. The black mamba is a snake of the cobra family and is about twelve feet long. He travels along with his head arched in the air as if always ready to strike. The green mamba, some say, is a young black mamba, but none of Van Dyke's crew took time out to investigate. The less they saw of them the better. The mambas and the puff adder are found all through Africa, more or less, and are not to be trifled with. The spitting cobra was most feared. This fellow actually spits some kind of blinding poison fluid into the eyes of his victim and then he strikes for the kill. It is said they are accurate at eight feet. One of the other three or four times that Van Dyke was really scared was while walking up the trail one night at Fajoa to see if the crocodile gates were holding. He and Dickinson had just leaned against the gates to try them out when a big croc crashed against the other side. It knocked Van down in the brush. He thought he heard a spitting cobra hiss just as he fell flat on his face in the dark tall grass and he spared no horses in getting up onto his feet. He even admitted he was scared . . . he said, "Shows what a fellow's imagination will do."

The Cape Buffalo (not water buffalo) is one of the most dangerous of jungle beasts for, unlike the rhino, this big fellow has sharp eyes and a keen scent. He is known to be able to run on three legs and to possess an uncanny sense of revenge. He is a very difficult animal to hunt, for if only wounded he will let a man start to track him down and then when he knows he is on his trail, the buffalo will circle and double back, catching him unawares from behind.

A seasoned hunter will leave the cape buffalo alone. Van Dyke and his crew were not seasoned hunters. They were in a marsh area where the waters of the Nguruman flowed down from the hills out into the flats and sank into Africa. There was about five acres of clear plain and prairie land and in the center was an acre of elephant grass surrounded by a marsh or swamp. Directly across on the other side of the elephant grass was a big herd of buffalo . . . about one hundred and fifty . . . and they were up wind. Keeping the tall grass between them and the animals, they tried sneaking up on them but soon hit the marshy ground and their car stopped. Van Dyke turned to Dickinson and asked, "Dick, do you think the herd would charge us if we get out here and continue afoot?" "I hardly think so," Dickinson replied. "They will seldom charge in a herd. We might get a charge out of a few old bulls, but that's what you want, isn't it?" Woody turned to Bob Roberts and George Nogle and told them to put their cameras on their backs. The boys never hesitated a moment or uttered a word of protest. It was Van's intention to wade up to the tall elephant grass, get through to the other side and set up the cameras before the buffalo were aware of their presence. They didn't get far before they started to sink knee deep in the mire. Poor Bob Roberts and Nogle with the heavy Ackley cameras on their backs were stuck. Roberts was waist deep. The buffalo got wind of them and started to come and as they hit the tall dry elephant grass it sounded like the sudden roaring of a huge waterfall. Van went numb all over. Van knew that if the buffalo came through the grass they would be on top of his crew before they even saw them. Bob Roberts said, "Mr. Van Dyke, would you like to buy a good camera cheap?"

Woody's gun boy, Riano, as cool as a cucumber, was standing right behind him with two shells held ready to slip into the elephant gun. Dickinson stood by. Right behind him was Harry Albiez with his little toy De Vry camera, bound and determined to get a picture. Next to him was George Nogle, trying to get his tripod planted in some kind of position but it was slowly sinking out of sight in the mud. Then, as quickly as it started, there was a dead silence. This was worse than the noise. The buffalo had stopped short. Getting their wind a little stronger, they hesitated before another charge. That was the break Van was waiting for. "Get those damn cameras out of here," he yelled. "Wait a minute, Van," Dickinson said calmly, "I think they'll start again, old man, if you give them a chance, and you'll get your picture." "That's what I'm afraid of!" Woody replied, "and you get the hell out of here, too!"

They reached the car safely, and after scraping the mud off their feet, headed for camp. The Englishman smiled. He had finally actually seen Van Dyke back down. Woody said, "Okay, okay — you win. But don't forget, we won the battle of Bunker Hill!" They all started laughing, at the same time wiping the perspiration from their brows. However, Major Dickinson had known all of the time that they were not in as great danger as they appeared to be.

The greatest thrill Van experienced was going into the dense brush after a wounded lion. In Africa, it is an unwritten law that when game is wounded, one must keep after it until he either brings it down or loses the trail. Dickinson told Van Dyke how this was done. He said, "You hold your gun constantly cocked before you. You can gamble you will get only one shot and no more, if you get that, before the animal is upon you. Then you advance one step, and part the grass in front of you with the muzzle of the rifle, looking carefully all around within a radius of eight or ten feet. Then advance another step and repeat the operation."

"When the lion strikes," he said, "there is only one thing to do to save your life — drop and remain absolutely motionless, as though dead — and let the lion do as he pleases because the part of your body that moves is the part the lion will grab."

Van wanted to chalk up another lion so he and Dickinson went hunting. They soon located what they were after and Woody fired. He made a hit and was about to run over to his victim when the more cautious Dickinson stopped him and warned that the big cats are wily creatures and hard to kill. Dickinson was right, for Van had just stunned the lion and he was now up on all fours and away in the thick brush. Then the task began. Woody had to trail him. The grass was so thick that when he parted it with the muzzle of his gun he could only see a few feet ahead of him. The cold perspiration was running down the back of Van's hand onto his trigger finger. Riano was right on Van's heels, ammunition in one hand and a round tin can of cigarettes in the other. The gun boy was as unhappy about the whole thing as was Van Dyke. He was stepping as cautiously as a slow motion figure on the screen. This continued for several minutes with Van so keyed up he would have jumped out of his skin if Riano burped. Suddenly a little black oribi, a midget antelope about the size of a large jackrabbit, popped out of the brush right in their faces. Van fired so quickly it knocked his helmet off and Riano tripped and fell flat on his face. Woody's sun helmet crashed down on the back of the black boy's neck and Riano was sure it was the lion grabbing him. When Van and Dickinson picked him up the tin of cigarettes, still clenched in his fist, was squashed as flat as though it had been placed in a vise.

After seven months of experience like this, Van Dyke decided he had had enough. He had been solely responsible for the lives and health of thirty-five whites, one hundred and ninety-two blacks and ninety tons of equipment. The expedition had cost thousands of dollars. He had on film over thirty-five varieties of African big game (*) with his actors working in scenes with them. He had recorded and filmed the dances, the songs and native life of over fifteen African tribes. He had photographed the beauty spots of Africa as well as the sun-blistered veldt land; he had crossed the equator eighteen times in that seven months; he and his company had covered more than nine thousand miles of African soil by auto, to say nothing of the rail, lake and river travel, plus many long treks afoot. They had seen and photographed the interiors of four African colonies — Tanganyika, Kenya, Uganda and the Congo. He had done the impossible: Chartered trains and boats to get the company to places in a week that he was told would take a month. They had broken every tradition and law of the elements of this land. They had successfully maneuvered ninety tons of equipment through terrain where there never had been roads, and he still had most of it with them. He had seen his gang build trails, roads, crocodile pens, traps, animal blinds, reproduction of native villages, camps, camera booms out of trees, and sets, in less time than one would have believed possible, and under the most adverse circumstances.

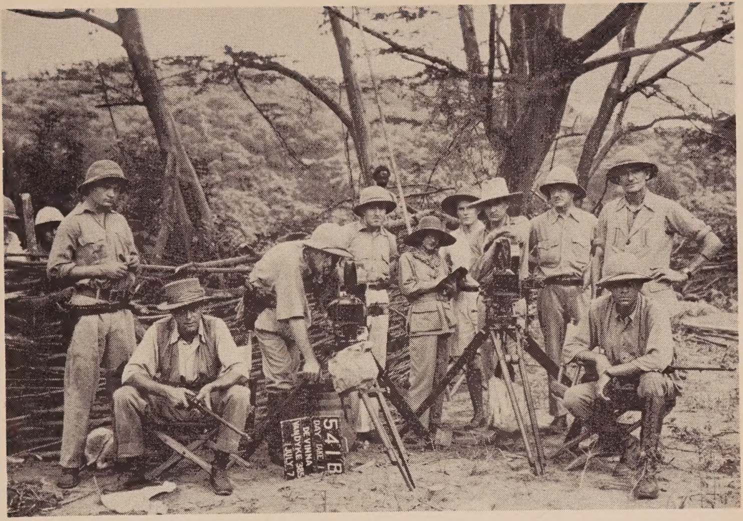
He finally had on film the culmination of that idea that had started back in Hollywood when somebody had said, "Let's send Van Dyke to Africa to make 'Trader Horn'." He could now leave, and with every member, white and black, safe and sound. The tall, lean, weary man from Bundy Drive, West Los Angeles, was lying on the cot in his tent. He stretched out his legs and arms, heaved a sigh of relief and, for the first time in those seven long months, had a good night's sleep.

* * *

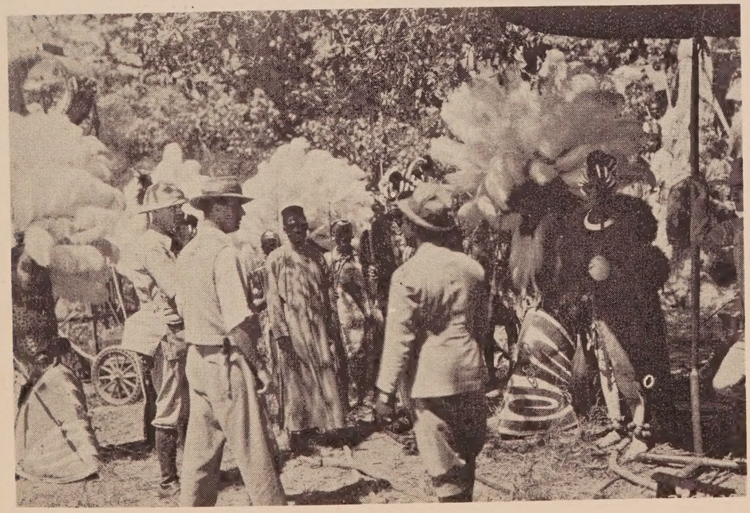
(*) Wildebeest
Hartebeest
Lion
Hyena
Elephant
Gernuk
Jackall
Bush Buck
Reed Buck
Cheetah
Wild Hog
Duiker
Giraffe
Rhinoceros
Hippopotamus
Grant
Eland
Wart Hog
Sable
Stein Buck
Dik Dik
Leopard
Hyrax
Water Buck
Topi
Tommy
Impala
Buffalo
Ostrich
Zebra
Oryx
Roan
Baboon
Crocodile
Oribi

Chapter 21

DEBUNKING AN "EXCLUSIVE"



TOP — Part of Van Dyke's staff in the Uganda region, Africa. (L. to R.) Dale Deverman, cameraman; Major Dickinson, white hunter; Clyde DeVinna, head cameraman; "Red" Golden, asst. director; Josephine Chippo, script girl; Louis Devenaid, British asst. cameraman; George Nogle, cameraman; Dr. Clark; white hunter Waller; seated, W. S. Van Dyke II.



(Photo by Bob Roberts, MGM)

BOTTOM — Van Dyke, Major Dickinson, and their interpreter, a native Prince and Oxford graduate, in consultation with Kavirondo warriors.

Head of buffalo shot in British East Africa by Van Dyke. (L. to R.) ***Bob Roberts****, Akeley cameraman; "Red" Golden, asst. director; "Pop" Arnold, head of grip department.*

"Andy" Anderson checks sound before recording a scene in Africa. Note cameraman wrapping blanket around camera to keep mike from picking up sound of the noisy Akeley camera.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Debunking an "Exclusive"

A group of M-G-M executives was looking at selected shots of the film Van Dyke had brought back from Africa. "Those lions look too peaceful," said a studio official. "The public will never believe that shot was made in the jungle."

Van Dyke had himself said the same thing more than once when filming "Trader Horn." He explained to the executives how they had seen such an abundance of game at times it had been difficult to know what to shoot. He told them how, in the area that had been under quarantine, the animals were actually curious at the sight of the two-legged creatures who constituted Van's party.

A member of the group spoke up, "But Van Dyke, the public has been educated to believe that all African game is wild and they won't believe those pictures were made in the jungle unless they see the animals snarling and showing their fangs." Van replied, "That's fantastic! Why, take that scene of lions you just looked at. They're semi-tame, if you can imagine such a thing. We ran into that bunch one day just as you saw them on the screen." Woody continued, "They weren't concerned in the least at our presence and I realized what a great picture it would be. Either they had never seen white men before and were unafraid, or else they were so well fed they weren't interested. In any event, we made the take. The purpose of this expedition was to photograph wild game in their natural haunts," Van continued. "There they are — thirty-five different varieties — and just as we found them!"

"Trader Horn" had been widely publicized and, as is so frequently the case in Hollywood, when one certain type of picture is given considerable publicity there is a run on the same kind of ideas from other studios. Some jungle films had been released by another company, showing fights between different kinds of animals. One of the M-G-M officials felt that "Trader Horn" should have something of that same sort in it as well as the action Van had filmed. A unit was sent to Mexico to make these additional animal scenes while Van was completing some retakes of other things he had to make at the studio. Woody had run into problems in Africa. The sound equipment he had taken proved faulty. It was all right for recording animal noises and the native dances, but their Ackley cameras made so much noise they couldn't shoot the close-ups in sound without picking up the noise of the cameras. To protect himself, Woody had made numerous background shots so that when he got back to Hollywood he could re-shoot the close-ups for dialogue over these backgrounds. In order to do this he had to bring to Hollywood Mutia Oomooloo, the giant black who played the part of Renchero, Trader Horn's gun boy in the picture. He also had to bring along his own gun boy, Riano, as a companion, or Mutia wouldn't make the trip.

When the unit from Mexico returned and screened its film, it was so inferior to the real African photography it was all shelved. An "exclusive" story broke out, however, that M-G-M had remade the entire picture at the studio. Van Dyke and his crew were irked for they had gone through hell to get the 100,000 feet of printed negative now in the studio lab. Woody had known that, once they left Africa for home, there would be no retakes of the film he had and to protect the studio they had used up 450,000 feet of negative on the trip.

"Trader Horn" was press previewed at the Egyptian Theatre in Hollywood. Van Dyke was asked to say a few words about the trip. Upon being introduced he said he felt that, as members of the press, it was only right they should know the truth . . . that, after all, no one member of the press was entitled to the "exclusive" story behind "Trader Horn." "One adventure writer," he continued, "was so bold as to tell me there are no more jungles in Africa than there are in Missouri, and another woman adventurer says African lions don't have manes. And I read in the papers that the whole picture was made here in Hollywood. So I'm going to give it to you straight!" All eyes and ears were now focused on Van Dyke. With a twinkle in his eye, and an infectious smile, Van Dyke said, "We didn't go to Africa at all! The lions were photographed at Gay's Lion Farm in El Monte; the elephants in the San Diego zoo; the monkeys and the hippo at Central Park in New York; and the crocodiles at the alligator farm in Florida." There was a roar of laughter and somebody in the audience yelled, "Where'd you get the cannibals, Van?" Woody chuckled, "Oh, them? I shot them in Harlem!" It brought a howl from the press and squelched much of the rumors and erroneous reports. Their reviews were excellent and "Trader Horn" set box office records the world over.

Chapter 22

THE NOSE, THE VOICE, THE HAIRCUT

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The Nose, The Voice, The Haircut

"Jimmy Durante is on the phone, Mr. Van Dyke!" It was Florence Thomas, Van's secretary, speaking.

"Hello, Jimmy. What do you know about opera?"

"I know dere's bullfighters in 'Carmen' or 'Faust' but I don't know which one!" said Durante, laughing.

"You're hired!"

L. B. Mayer had started all of this. He had contracted Lawrence Tibbett and Lupe Velez to do "The Cuban Love Song" and then called in Van Dyke to direct. Since the advent of sound, the music of Broadway revue type had proved popular on the screen. Mr. Mayer felt the music of opera could be equally successful if presented properly. In calling Van Dyke into his office he had said, "Van, what do you know about opera?"

"Not a thing in the world," he replied.

"That's good," said L. B., who had explained it was his desire to wed the music of opera to the screen. He had told Van that some executives on the lot thought him foolish to give him the assignment, but he added, "I don't want to wed opera to the screen, Van, just its music!" The story, "The Cuban Love Song," had a Marine Corps background and Mr. Mayer felt Van Dyke could keep it from going stale musically.

"From Africa to opera?" columnists wrote, — "Has L. B. gone nuts?"

But L. B. Mayer remembered that Van Dyke hadn't known anything about Africa . . . nor had he known anything about the South Seas or the Indians in Wyoming, but it hadn't taken him long to find out.

There was need for good comedy relief in this picture so, in casting, they chose Jimmy Durante, who had just finished a spot in "Get Rich Quick Wallingford" on the M-G-M lot. Durante reported to Van Dyke's office and said, "Wid Lupe Velez in de cast and dey asks me do I want de job?" Van Dyke told him to report the next day. Thinking he was going to get the lead, Jimmy said, "I'll start practicing me croonin' as well as me Cuban right away!" But Woody told him he didn't want him for the singing, Lawrence Tibbett was going to do that. "Would ja believe it? Even in de movies dey has 'em!" Asked what he meant, he slapped both thighs with his hands as he paced back and forth, "Dem guys wid de voice dat's always hornin' in!" He told Van Dyke that he'd sing love songs to Lupe a lot cheaper than Tibbett but Van told him he had a much better part for him.

Jimmy had been selected to be the Marine Corps General. "After all," Woody said, "nobody outranks the General, you know." Durante smiled, "Mr. Van Dyke, I'm goin' to like dis kind of carryings on." Van continued, "Of course you are, Jimmy. The voice for the singing, and Durante for that Marine Corps masculine pulchritude." "The Nose," now happy, raised his eyes shyly and with a broad smile, took off his hat as he shook his head and said, "That's my boy who said that!"

The shooting schedule was laid out, the cast called, and Jimmy sent to wardrobe to be made up as a General. They pounced on him like a bunch of locusts on a green tree and before Durante knew it all he had left on was his shorts. In a few minutes he was all dressed up from tip to toe. Durante looked in the mirror. "Get a load of dat poiple, red and blue. Doze Generals sure go in for fancy bits of knick-knacks." Jimmy knew that Generals were important guys in the Marines, but he didn't know they wore so much stuff, they fastened epaulets on his shoulders, pinned medals on his chest and then gave him a huge sword. To top him off, they placed a shiny helmet on his head, with a big plume in front — the kind worn by the old Prussian Guard. The "General" strode out of the wardrobe building.

He was greeted at the door by a chauffeur who, with a big black Cadillac limousine, waited to take him to the sound stage. Jimmy said,"Boy, dis is a racket!" He proudly reported to Mr. Van Dyke on the stage . . . blew the plumes out of his face and said, "General Durante reporting for duty, sir!" Van Dyke looked him over curiously, walked around him a couple of times and said, "I don't know, Jimmy. I don't know." Durante replied, "Don't you like it?" To which Woody answered, "Oh, sure, sure, you look fine. But you see, Mr. Mayer is in charge of production and he really is the last word in all matters like this. I think you'd better get his okay on that outfit." With a "Yes, sir!", like the soldier he now was, General Durante clicked his heels sharply and about-faced. But his sword caught between his legs and he fell flat on his schnozzola. Quickly regaining his poise, he brushed himself off, saluted and went clanking out the door to his limousine and headed for the front office to see what the Commander-in-Chief had to say.

The General's black Cadillac pulled up to the Administration Building. With the stride of a Napoleon, he briskly walked into the executive offices and said, "Da President wants to see me right away!" He was whisked into a spacious office. Mr. Mayer took one look at him and said, "Too much rank for the story. Make it a Colonel." Durante was whisked out as a dozen secretaries flew in.

It was a hot day . . . in fact it was a very hot day. The California sun was rising higher and higher. The jacket of his uniform was of heavy material and the high stiff collar buttoned so tight around his neck it was nearly choking him. The General was beginning to feel the pressure of movie making, but he climbed back into his big black limousine and returned to the stage to report to Van Dyke. He told the director what Mr. Mayer had said and Van replied, "He's right, Jimmy! I thought that was too much rank for the part. Go back to wardrobe and have them make the change."

This time he picked up his sword and about-faced. He drove back to wardrobe, clanked up two flights of stairs, and told them what Mr. Mayer and his director had said . . . and, presto, he was peeled of his rank! Colonel Durante came out of the building and the driver of the Cadillac said, "Sorry, Colonel, that's not enough rank for this car," drove away and sent him a Plymouth.

Reporting back to the set, Van Dyke greeted him with "That's much better, Jimmy! Did you check with Mannix?" Colonel Durante said, "Do I have to check wid him, too?" Van Dyke continued, "Oh, indeed, Jimmy, of course you do! Eddie Mannix is General Manager and you'll have to get his permission to change the part from a General to a Colonel." Again picking up his sword, the busy Marine was driven back to the front office in his Plymouth to check with General Manager Mannix. Walking up to the third floor for the second time, much warmer and nearly out of breath, he was whisked into another spacious office. Mannix quickly sized him up and down and said, "Huh-uh. Nope. That'll never do. Too much rank for the budget on this picture. Tell Van Dyke to make you Major."

It's a good thing the Marines can take it! Colonel Durante clanked down three flights of stairs, his sword banging on each step as he tried to keep a clear head, and was again driven back to the set. It was now noon . . . the stage was dark, the entire company had gone to lunch. Jimmy walked to the commissary and ate lunch — standing up. He couldn't sit down because of his sword.

At one o'clock he reported back to the stage and told the director what the General Manager had said, but Van Dyke yelled, "Oh no, Jimmy, not that! Mannix is wrong! That's not what the part calls for at all." "Was I mortified," Durante said, "Maybe da part calls for a recruitin' officer?"

Poor Jimmy! Van Dyke sent him to Mr. Thalberg, who agreed with Mr. Mannix, and wardrobe again peeled him of his rank and sent Durante to Al Lichtman, Executive Producer, who screamed, "No! Not that!!" Lichtman quickly scribbled a memo on a piece of paper and Durante was rushed back to wardrobe and came out this time a Second Lieutenant. He hadn't even gotten to the door before the telephone rang and further orders were given wardrobe. It was Ben Thau, another producer on the picture. Jimmy said, "What? Two producers on da same picture?"

In a few minutes, Private Durante came out of wardrobe in dungarees. The driver of the Plymouth said, "Sorry, Joe" and Jimmy walked back to the set. Stripped of his medals, sword, bars, uniform and epaulets, the deflated Durante was met at the stage door by Van Dyke, "That's it! that's it, Jimmy! Now you look just the part." Durante sighed and said, "Da Marines have landed! I'm in!" And just then some guy blew a whistle and Van Dyke yelled, "That's all for today — eight o'clock call in the morning."

Mr. Mayer, Eddie Mannix, Mr. Thalberg, Al Lichtman and Ben Thau all played their parts seriously. That's what threw Jimmy Durante. If Van Dyke hadn't kept sending him to the big shots, he might have become suspicious, but he hadn't been around Metro long enough to know that even they frequently figured in on some of Van Dyke's elaborate gags. Jimmy thought he was being demoted awfully fast, but who was he to tell the President, the Vice President, the General Manager and two Producers at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer what was right!

Van Dyke told him the next day it was all in fun. They just wanted to start him off right. Jimmy got started off all right, and soon became the sparkplug himself for much fun with Tibbett, Ernest Torrance and Madame Como, the French comedienne. About a week later Jimmy got caught again. They were shooting a scene in a drug store and Private Durante was supposed to be drinking a chocolate soda while talking to some girls. As the scene got under way, everybody started to laugh. Jimmy said, "What's funny about drinking a soda?" In a short time he found out. The crew had put castor oil in the soda, the chocolate killing the taste. But let it not be said that a Durante who had spent most of his life on the stage didn't know a few tricks too. That he did — and Van Dyke and the crew became the recipients on several occasions before the picture was finished.

The fun was all good insofar as Van Dyke was concerned. "The Cuban Love Song" had been the studio's first attempt to wed the music of opera to the screen and Van knew that not a scene must become stilted. A light treatment of story throughout was necessary to introduce Tibbett properly to the great mass audience of the screen. Van had learned that a spirit of fun could keep a movie company from getting stale — and to that end, Durante had certainly fit in.

Upon completion of the picture, Van Dyke gave a party at his new and spacious home in the Hollywood hills, for the entire cast, crew, and their friends. The high-light of the evening was a concert by Tibbett of several opera arias. But the accompanist had failed to show up so Durante substituted for him at the piano. The "concert" concluded with Van Dyke joining in. It wasn't, "I'm the Voice, I'm the Nose, I'm the Haircut." It was "Traviata" they sang and it could never be done like that again.

Chapter 23

FIFTY BELOW ZERO

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

Fifty Below Zero

About the middle of June, 1923, the manager of the Teller Station of the Lomen Commercial Company, Nome, Alaska, received a one-hundred word telegram from Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer instructing him to purchase large quantities of seal skins, reindeer skins, walrus skins, and polar bear skins, along with many other items. The message also gave instructions to round up all the Eskimos they could get from Teller to Kotzebue and have them dressed in native garb and in their "oomiaks" (large skin boats). The Lomen Company was also directed to open its camp and cook house at Reindeer Station and establish a mess for the natives.

The orders in the wire were carried out to the letter and as soon as ice conditions permitted, fifteen large oomiaks with about a hundred and fifty Eskimos arrived from Cape Prince of Wales, the Diomede Islands, Shishmaref, and other areas. Receiving no further information as to the reason for all this activity, J. I. Andersen, manager of the Teller Station for the Lomen Company requested the Nome office to wire M-G-M that their instructions had been carried out to the letter and they were waiting for further orders. A return wire was received stating that the schooner, "Nanuk" with a movie group in charge of a Mr. W. S. Van Dyke would arrive at Teller within twenty-four hours. Andersen was told to report to Van Dyke and he would receive all further orders from him.

Port Clarence Bay was still full of drift ice, but the second morning following receipt of the wire from Nome, an Eskimo rushed into the store and told Andersen a vessel was approaching though the ice. Andersen took his binoculars and spotted a three-masted schooner and knew it must be the Nanuk.

As soon as the sailing schooner neared the spitt between Port Clarence Bay and Grantley Harbor, a welcoming party headed by the Lomen Company's tug, "Wave," proceeded through the ice cakes to greet them. There were many oomiaks and several small boats rigged with outboard motors loaded to the gunwales with Eskimos. The sound of the motors echoed for miles around in the crystal clear atmosphere of this 65th parallel of latitude. The Nanuk dropped anchor on the north side of Grantley Harbor and the welcoming party made a picturesque sight as they circled the ship three times cheering and saluting their guests. The tug, "Wave," then pulled alongside and Andersen went aboard to meet Van Dyke. Mr. Andersen thought Van would be enthusiastic over this welcome, which he was, but at the moment, Woody was all business. He wanted to know how many Eskimos he had, where they were, what provisions had been made to feed and house them, how much gear he had acquired, where it was, what about locations, and when they would be able to move to their summer quarters. The Lomen Company's representative was beginning to think this gang the coldest-blooded outfit he had ever met.

After several attempts, he finally found out the reason for summoning the Eskimos to Teller. It was to make screen tests to select one for the character of "Mala," the lead in the picture, "Eskimo," which they were going to film. Andersen informed Van Dyke that more food was needed at the camp to feed the Eskimos and Van instructed his crew to provide the necessary meat and fish. Andersen, amused, explained that the Eskimos needed more than meat and fish, but Van Dyke blasted, "I'm not coming up here to spoil these people. They're going to get their native food." Mr. Andersen said, "But Mr. Van Dyke, you don't understand. These fellows may be dressed in native costume and are real Eskimos, but they are accustomed to white man's food and you'll lose all your Eskimos unless you feed them what they are accustomed to eating." Woody replied, "All right, but don't ever let it be said that we came up here and spoiled them." What Mr. Andersen had been trying to tell Van Dyke was that Eskimos as read about in history and fiction did not exist any more in that area. Civilization had made the Eskimos of fiction almost extinct. It was hard for Van to think of Eskimos living on anything but blubber, fish and meat because that's what Peter Freuchen said they lived on in the story he was to film and that must be right. The story was right, but the period depicted was many moons back in history. The ice, the waters of Port Clarence Bay and the setting were still the same, but the habits of the people had changed. The book "Eskimo" was written by Peter Freuchen, world explorer and Arctic adventurer. An authority on the lives and habits of the Eskimo of yesteryear, Freuchen went along with the unit as a technical advisor for the screen version by John L. Mahin.

J. I. Andersen soon found out that his first impression of Van Dyke was a false one. Like so many others before him, after getting to know this lanky Yankee, he learned to respect him and then that respect grew into admiration, and the admiration into a friendship of the kind that wears well.

They soon settled down to brass tacks. The natives were all summoned and screen tests made. An Eskimo by the name of Robert Mayo, of Wales, was chosen for the part of "Mala." Andersen was instructed to have native skin-sewers erect twenty native igloos (skin igloos). Peter Freuchen made drawings of the type they wanted and gave instructions as to how they were to be built. Van Dyke and Freuchen insisted everything had to be done exactly as the Eskimos built them during the period indicated in the film. Even the poles for the framework had to be cut from green willows and lashed together with rawhide.

The local folks quickly changed their minds about all of the stories they had heard about the faking of the movies. Van Dyke and Freuchen were sticklers for authenticity, in fact, they even taught the Teller Mission Eskimos a few tricks they hadn't learned from their own more modern parents.

Van divided the company into units. While one unit was busily engaged off the coast of Siberia getting whaling shots, another one was erecting two summer camps. One camp was established at Salt Lake near Canyon Creek for the Eskimos and another one for the whites at the mouth of the Tuksuk Channel. A third unit stayed with the *Nanuk* in Grantley Harbor about two miles from M-G-M's headquarters. Time was the great factor and Van Dyke was working every angle he knew to get as much of the story on film as possible before the freeze set in and they would have to stop work because of weather conditions.

Van Dyke himself was making the shots of the natives. He had just completed the opening scene of the picture which had called for Mala, the Mighty Hunter, to be seen with his two sons, Puala — eleven, and Orsokidok — fifteen, hunting geese on the lake. The shot had come out fine. At the moment he was ready to photograph *TAKE* 5: — A CLOSE SHOT OF MALA AND THE TWO BOYS. He gave the cue for action, and Mala with bow and arrows on his back, has two enormous bunches of geese hung over his shoulders. Puala and Orsokidok grin as they look up at their father. The three natives are dressed in their light summer skins, with no hoods to their parkas. Van Dyke and the camera truck ahead of them as they walk along on either side of a line of about twelve dogs, each dog burdened with a share of the kill. One dog tries to sample his load, but Orsokidok slaps his mouth away from it. Mala looks back at the line of burdened dogs and then turns to his boys, putting his hands on their shoulders, with a smile, "If only walrus molted in summer and lost their flippers!" Orsokidok replies, "Life would be easy." "My stepson speaks wisely." The younger boy looks up at his father, "We always have meat because of Mala, the mighty hunter." Mala pats him on the shoulder, "Some day, my son too will bring meat to his own igloo."

Van Dyke was pleased with the take. He could not assign these shots to anyone else because these people were native Eskimos and many of them had never seen a camera before. Each bit of action had to be explained in detail. Every move had to be shown to them and much gesticulation had to substitute for words. The drab monotony of this kind of directing caused "adventure" movie-making to be tedious work.

They move the camera set-up to the native village. It is near the shore of the bay and consists of walrus-hide tents . . . about twenty of them. Eskimos are in evidence all around — men, women, and children. Smoke rises from the huts. Even though summertime in the Arctic the temperature is around forty-five or fifty degrees. Aba — Mala's wife — is seated outside her tent sewing on some skins. Old Naterk — Mala's aged mother — sits stoically staring out into space. Little Upik — Mala's four year old son — rushes into the scene with other children. They are playing tag. Naterk reaches out and grabs Upik and examines a rip in Upik's parka. She calls this to the attention of Aba, who nods. Upik's eyes widen with delight as he starts yelling and pointing. Aba and Naterk look. They get up, putting aside their sewing, as other inhabitants stop what they are doing and gather to look in the direction Upik is pointing. The women all chatter excitedly, while the men stand calm and dignified, as is their custom.

The camera is moved again for a medium trucking shot of Mala's party approaching in the distance. It is a gorgeous pictorial shot that catches them coming down the hill, the dogs loaded with geese following. Mala is bent over by the kayak on his back and remains calm. But his two sons cannot hide their pride at bringing in so much meat and they grin broadly, looking up at their father.

Most of the summer sequence was now on film. They had been in Alaska a little over two months and everything was going along on schedule. Eddie Hearn had Mala, the Eskimo, with the unit up in the Arctic Seas off the coast of Siberia getting whaling shots when their Eskimo star, Robert Mayo, said in English, "No work any more." Try as Hearn did, the Eskimo wouldn't and didn't work.

Eddie got Van Dyke on the air via short wave radio and told him of his trouble. He was promptly instructed to get back with the Eskimo to Teller as soon as possible.

When they arrived at Teller, Woody refused to talk to the Eskimo until he could find what the trouble was. Unable to find any reason for his wanting to quit from Hearn or members of that unit, Van sent for Andersen and told him to report to the Nanuk immediately. Anderson wasted no time in getting out to the ship, which was anchored about three miles across the harbor from Teller. Van Dyke told him that after testing a hundred and fifty Eskimos, shooting several thousand feet of film and using up two months of valuable time before winter set in, his leading man decided to quit and he couldn't find out why. Andersen immediately went to Robert Mayo and explained the terrible predicament he had placed the company in, but Mayo wouldn't talk. Andersen then explained that the entire story was built around the character, Mala, and that not one man in a million got a chance like he was getting to play the lead in a great picture like this. This had no effect. The only thing that was forth-coming from Robert Mayo was that his mother-in-law at Wales was going to have an operation and he thought he and his wife should be there with her. Andersen returned to Van Dyke and informed him that his pleadings were of no avail and he was afraid no one could influence the Eskimo to remain.

Woody Van Dyke was always considerate of his people, but he demanded consideration from them too. He had a temper whenever anything got in his way that would hinder him from successfully fulfilling a commitment. And at the moment one Eskimo was causing a complete shut down. Van was mad, and like a lion who starts bellowing in Africa warning the inhabitants of his world that he was out for the kill, Woody Van Dyke was warning everyone within the radius of his voice that he meant business too. He ordered the Eskimo brought to his cabin at once. "Mayo," he said, "I'll give you just twenty-four hours to change your mind. That's ten o'clock tomorrow morning, and you be here in person with your answer!" The following morning at ten o'clock the native reported to the Nanuk. Van Dyke met him at the gangway, "Well!!" The Eskimo replied quietly, "No." Van Dyke handed him a check which he already had in his hand, apparently knowing what the Eskimo's answer would be, and said, "Get out of here and if you or your wife or child ever set foot in this area again, I'll have you thrown overboard."

All of that hard work to get the story on film before the freeze set in, and then this terrible setback! Later on it was learned why Robert Mayo had quit. Some of the men in the camp had made advances to his wife and the Eskimo considered it safer to have her back at Wales. Instead of telling Van Dyke the truth and causing trouble in the unit, he told the sick mother-in-law story.

Van Dyke at once laid out a new shooting schedule without Mala. Eddie Hearn, who had been in charge of that particular unit, wondered what the boss was going to do. After all, Eskimo actors don't grow on bushes in the Arctic. One morning when Eddie was getting his gang together for a take, he heard an airplane in the distance. Looking up, he saw a tiny speck approaching in the sky, just as Van Dyke called out, "Hey, Hearn, there comes your Mala." Caught by surprise, Eddie said, "What did you say?" Van repeated, "There comes your Mala." A plane with pontoons glided into the still waters of the lagoon and two men stepped out as a small boat with outboard motor pulled alongside. One had long black hair over his shoulder and Hearn recognized Ray Wise, of Eskimo descent, born and raised in Candle, Alaska, who was a second cameraman at the studio in Hollywood. The studio had wanted Van Dyke to use Wise as Mala, but he had insisted on using a one hundred percent native cast. This time Woody had played a wrong hunch. Nevertheless, when he saw he was in trouble, he wasted no time in getting in touch with the studio by short wave radio to find out if Wise was still available, and before he had paid off the first Mala he had received a radio confirmation from the studio that Ray Wise was on his way.

After getting squared around with their new Mala and making the best of a bad start, Van Dyke called Andersen into his quarters, "So far, you've been able to do everything

I've requested of you, but I've got a job now that I'm afraid will stump you." Andersen said if it was humanly possible he'd certainly try, and asked what the job was. Woody told him that before leaving Hollywood he had promised several movie stars he would send each one a fur coat. He said he never made a promise he didn't fulfill so he wanted Andersen to engage someone to make twelve fur coats. This was a man-sized order. Andersen asked him what kind of fur he wanted. Van asked, "What kind of furs can you get?" He was told they had a number of ground squirrel skins at the store in addition to some ermine.Woody said, "That's great. Make the coats." Andersen took on the job, but just as he started to leave, Van said, "By the way, make them all just twelve inches long." Andersen thought Woody was kidding, but he assured him he was not. Van said he hadn't told any of the girls what size coat they would get, he had just promised them each a fur coat. Andersen sent for their most expert seamstress and told her he wanted to make twelve fur coats, twelve inches long. Jennie thought he had been drinking and started to go home, but was finally convinced he was serious and he explained what Van Dyke wanted. She selected the skins and buttons, but didn't have the proper materials for lining. They wired Laura Lomen in Nome and she sent some beautiful silk material to them by plane. The twelve coats were perfectly made and each one trimmed with ermine. When they were delivered to Van Dyke, he said, "Well, I'll be damned!" The coats were packed in regular size suit boxes, insured heavily, marked "Fur coat — handle with care" and mailed to the stars with notices written on them, "Do not open until Christmas."

Van and Hearn went to the summer camp to move the gear to their winter quarters before the freeze set in. It was necessary to haul the equipment by barge about twenty-two miles through the Tuksuk Channel from Salt Lake across the open Straits of Grantley Harbor to a point about three miles across the Bay from Teller. Being so far behind schedule, they had had to remain at their summer location longer than Woody anticipated to make the Mala retakes. This made him uneasy for he knew when winter set in it set in overnight. The minute they finished their last retake at the summer camp he called for Hearn and gave him the following orders: "Get this equipment moving down the Tuksuk to our winter camp as quick as you can get it loaded. We have two tugs and I want one for each barge. The water in Grantley Harbor gets rough and I don't want to lose any equipment." When Woody gave an order he made it clear and explicit. He knew that Grantley Harbor pass was exposed to the open weather of Port Clarence Bay and the sea, and that the winds up there are unpredictable. If it blows, it really blows.

Their winter camp was located on the North shore of Grantley Harbor. The twenty-five and thirty foot tides of that area and strong winds make it a nasty spot to secure a barge if both tide and wind are not just right. Eddie Hearn said he understood, but to be sure he did, Van Dyke repeated the order . . . "One barge to a tug!" An affirmative answer was given by Hearn and Van Dyke got into the studio plane and flew to the winter camp where the schooner Nanuk was anchored. Two things indicated Van's grave concern at the moment. First, that he repeated his order to Hearn — something he seldom, if ever, did to anyone at any time; second, the fact that he flew to the winter camp. Even though there was a company plane always standing by, Van Dyke preferred snow shoes or dog sled. But he was in a hurry and worried about the approaching freeze and wanted to be sure that the winter camp was ready to be occupied.

Immediately upon Van's departure, Hearn started things moving. Two barges were loaded and he gave orders to have the tugs proceed with them down the Tuksuk Channel. Andersen, who had arrived with the barges, suggested that they take two tows with one tug, explaining that he had a third barge across the stream loaded with oil drums which they were to take upstream to some other camp after Van Dyke's job was completed. He pointed out that they could unload the oil drums and put the remainder of Van Dyke's equipment on the third barge, thereby moving the whole camp in one trip, saving time and money. Hearn questioned the safety of one tug handling two barges, but Andersen assured him there would be no danger. Realizing it would be impossible otherwise to move all of the equipment in one trip, and with time a great factor, Hearn consented. The third barge was brought alongside the bank of Canyon Creek Bay. The waters in the creeks and rivers of that country are very deep. The barge was easily moored snugly to the bank which was just about the same height as the barge, making the operation of unloading the oil drums a rather simple one. All hands turned to, and in a relatively short time, Van Dyke's summer camp was loaded onto three barges. The larger of the two tugs made fast to two of them and the smaller tug tied onto the third one and the entire "camp" started down stream to the open bay.

Eddie Hearn was pleased. It was not often that one had a chance to out-smart Van Dyke. After all, if the freeze did hit that night, the tugs couldn't get back through the channel the next day to get the third load before the ice set in. He felt it was a justifiable move. As they left the Tuksuk Channel and proceeded into the open waters of Grantley Harbor, they ran into a stiff wind and nasty chop that bounced things around quite a bit. A sickly feeling came over Hearn but Andersen quickly assured him everything was secure and when Eddie saw the ease with which the Captain handled the two barges in tow, he soon felt quite relieved.

Hearn, now really satisfied, leaned against the rail of the tug's bridge as though he were the skipper. As the winter quarters came into view, he saw a tall lean form impatiently pacing back and forth along the shore. That stride and the short distance covered attracted his attention. There was something awfully familiar about that stride to Eddie Hearn. The man on shore would stop, peer through a pair of binoculars like a Napoleon observing a battle, stand motionless for a few moments, then briskly turn and retrace his steps. As the tug drew closer the man on shore became more distinguishable. Hearn now knew it was Van Dyke. He turned to Andersen and said, "The boss is sure mad."

As the tug pulled alongside the bank, two planks were thrown over for a gangway and there at the foot of them stood Van Dyke. He yelled out, "Who the hell told you to take two barges at one time?" Before Hearn had a chance to answer, Andersen cut in, "No one. I thought I would save you time and money by doing so." Van Dyke replied, "Saving money's my job. You've cost me two hours' delay pacing up and down this beach watching you silly fools coming across that bay with two barges in tow." Hearn tried to say something, but Van kept on raving to Andersen, so they started unloading. Van Dyke went to his cabin and in a few minutes sent for Andersen. Andersen stepped into his cabin and was greeted with, "Hi, kid. I'll buy you a drink." Andersen never heard another word from Van in reference to the two barges, but Eddie Hearn really got a dressing down later on. Van had cooled off quickly insofar as Andersen was concerned, for he was not actually in his employ. However, Hearn was his assistant and he expected him to carry out his orders to the letter regardless of what the circumstances might be. Hearn tried to explain to Van what had happened but all he got for an answer was, "What do you mean by disobeying my orders?" Eddie pointed out that he had been assured the tug could safely handle two barges, but Van Dyke wouldn't listen. Hearn got mad and went to his quarters. A tenseness came over the whole camp. He stayed there for a couple of hours expecting to be called any time, but Van Dyke didn't call. That night they sat at the same table for supper, but Van Dyke didn't speak and neither did Hearn. At breakfast the next morning neither even said good morning to the other. The freedom usually so evident in a Van Dyke unit was gone — everybody seemed to have a chip on his shoulder. Even though the crew was kept busy, this condition continued for two days and then Hearn went to Van Dyke and requested to be sent back by the next boat, plane or any other means of transportation. His request was denied. That night while pacing up and down inside his hutlet, Hearn's short wave radio set (their means of inter-communication) came on. It was Van Dyke and he said, "Hearn, put on your parka and come to my hut." It was cold outside, a good setting for the scene that was about to follow. Hearn put on his jacket and shoved off for Van Dyke's hut. Van's cabin was of the type usually used to "winter in" up there. Inside was a table, a few chairs, a bunk, cooking utensils and stove. There was one, however, little touch that gave it an air of home. He had had an Eskimo knock the side off a large packing case, fit some shelves in it and fasten curtains on the front. This was his pantry where he kept his midnight "snacks and snips."

Hearn knocked on the door and walked in. "Hi, kid," Van said blandly, "sit down!" Hearn sat down at the table. Van placed four barrel-type glasses on the table, filled two of them with water and then reached up into his pantry and produced a bottle of "Mad Miner's Brew."

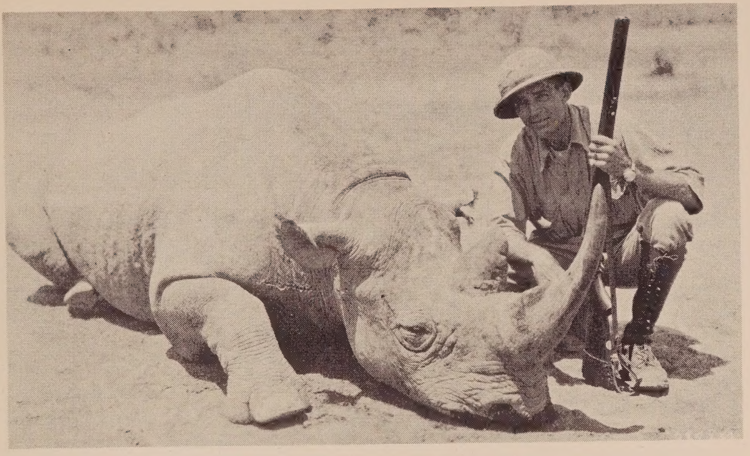
Van poured a pony for Hearn and one for himself. Neither man spoke a word. The wind howling outside seemed to stay at the same pitch, providing a perfect monotone for the scene being enacted inside. Van Dyke raised his glass and without a change of expression, looked at his assistant and said, "How." Hearn returned the courtesy, "How," and both men drank. Van Dyke refilled the glasses and again only said "How," not changing his expression in the least. They downed their drinks and as Woody started to fill the glasses for the third time, Hearn broke the tenseness and said, "Mr. Van Dyke, if you're trying to get me drunk, that's perfectly okay with me, but before you do, I want to ask you again — take me off this picture and send me back by the first boat or plane." Van Dyke then exploded, "Now you listen to me, damn you. All I want you to do is to make one promise." Hearn replied, "Certainly, I'll promise." Van's eyes flashed, "Why the devil are you saying you'll promise before you know what I'm going to ask you to promise?" Hearn assured him it was because he would do anything Van asked him. Woody continued, "I want you to promise me that from this moment on, no matter what I say or do . . . how I may say it . . . or what the circumstances are . . . you will never get mad at me again." Eddie said, "I promise." Even the wind seemed to subside and the whole affair was over. After all, as Hearn knew, Van did have a great responsibility on his hands with all of those people and the thousands of dollars in equipment that could not be replaced until the thaw next spring. Van had already lost two months valuable shooting time because of the trouble with his first leading man. Had anything happened to one of those barges and if some of the equipment had been washed overboard, there might not have been a movie "Eskimo."

Shortly after this experience they did nearly lose a barge plus the life of one of their crew members when a tug with two barges got caught in the wind and high tide while trying to make a landing. This is what Van Dyke had feared in the first place and had this occurred at the time the barges were loaded with his equipment, the result would have been disastrous.

There were those who found it difficult to work for Van Dyke. There are many who find it difficult to work for one who insists upon strict obedience. To Van Dyke, these trips were not just thrilling adventures . . . they were serious and dangerous expeditions, not to be undertaken lightly. He had an almost uncanny knowledge of men and how to handle them. A natural born leader, he was always the boss, and a hard one, but never beyond the reach of any of his troupe. Like the African trip he knew just what the men would need on this expedition and hadn't passed up a thing. Fifty tons of equipment had been packed in from Hollywood. During the first summer months the troupe lived in tents and Van had a chance to study and watch his gang. He had learned in Africa and the South Seas that some needed companionship and others preferred solitude. When it was time to move into the winter quarters he knew how to arrange the housing. Some were assigned individual "bungalows" and others doubled up. Woody called his winter quarters "Camp Hollywood" from which they were to sally forth by dog team to shoot scenes. It had all the earmarks of a typical bungalow court, even to the jangling noises of two or three portable victrolas, each playing a different tune at the same time. He often grinned and said, "We've got everything here but the palm trees and tiled courts." An old reindeer station, once used as a slaughterhouse and storage place for reindeer, had been selected as the center of the settlement. They rebuilt this building and it served as a stage for interiors, a billiard and recreation room, a gymnasium and, on occasions, a dance floor. The rest of the bungalow court consisted of small houses, carried from the United States in a knocked-down condition. Then there was the kitchen, built of rough boards and stocked with everything from mushrooms to caviar. Van was determined his gang should eat well. The chef he had engaged was no ordinary camp cook. He was Emil Ottinger, who once had cooked for Kaiser Wilhelm and other European royal families and who had been presiding over the kitchens of the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel. Woody believed that men couldn't work unless they were well fed and that they couldn't eat properly unless the food was appetizing. In the Artic, as in Africa, the Van Dyke company ate well and heartily. And the food was served, not thrown at them camp style with cutlery and tin cups.

All attention now turned to getting things ready for the winter. Van gave orders forbidding any member of the unit from skating on the bay until local authorities pronounced the ice safe. The minute the freeze set in, two fellows put on their skates and started across the ice. Van Dyke saw them and called them back, giving them a good dressing down. He didn't stop there, however. He called the entire company together and told them that he knew some probably thought him silly to be so strict. He pointed out that it not only was his job to get the story on film, but also to see that every member of the cast and crew, as well as all of the equipment, got safely home. He remarked, "I would rather be wrong fifty times about such silly things as not venturing on the ice, and be right once, if that once meant saving a life." He had no further trouble from there on.

Van had thought he encountered about the last word in living conditions while in Africa but he soon discovered it didn't compare with the ruggedness and isolation of a winter in the Artic. When the temperature reached twenty below zero there were cries from various cabins for additional stoves. And when the thermometer hovered between forty and fifty below, Van Dyke discovered the ceiling of his



Van Dyke with the rhino that charged the camera car.

"General" Durante posed with Lawrence Tibbett and Van Dyke for a brief moment before he was demoted to a buck private in "The Cuban Love Song."

This giant polar bear caused the Eskimos and Van Dyke's crew some unhappy moments until he was harpooned.

Peter Freuchen, famous author of the book Eskimo, playing the role of the white captain; in a scene taken aboard the Nanuk with the star of the film version, Mala (Ray Wise) and Aba (Lulu Wong Wing).

bungalow registered sixty or seventy degrees above while the floor was still thirty degrees below zero. It was so cold at times that water thrown out a cabin door would sound like firecrackers when it hit the air. Not one drop of moisture would reach the ground because it froze instantaneously. They had to use blow torches on the tractor engines to get them started in the morning. Two complete sets of cameras had to be rigged. One for outdoor shots and one for indoor work, because the extreme change of temperature made it impossible to take the cameras in and out of doors. If they had a buckle in the film and had to open the camera to adjust it, the inside would frost up instantly and the whole camera would then have to be taken inside, disassembled and dried out.

Bob Roberts, cameraman, nearly lost his tongue one day. Not knowing the danger of this land of cold and in the spirit of fun, he stuck out his tongue at one of the gang. The tip of it touched his camera case and instantly froze to it. Had he not pulled it off immediately, he would have been in real trouble.

Van Dyke frequently lost his temper during the winter freeze because of the conditions. He wanted snow, but the weather was so cold and the snow so dry at times that the wind would blow it all away. He wanted icicles, but it never got warm enough for the ice to melt to make icicles. Had it not been for his courage, great patience, persistence, and absolute fearlessness at times he would not have been successful on this project.

Mail and fresh supplies were flown into camp every two or three weeks when the weather permitted. When snowed in, they listened to dance music over their radios from Los Angeles' Cocoanut Grove, Van Dyke's favorite night spot, and also from France, England and Germany. They tried to forget their homesickness by playing practical jokes on one another or in reading the romantic novels which Van had remembered to bring. At Christmas time they had a huge tree and gifts for each other. Roast turkeys were flown in by plane from the nearest settlement. Van Dyke flew to Teller and bought out the entire stock of the only candy store and gave the sweets to the Eskimo children near the camp. The weather had been extremely variable, which made it difficult to plan on anything definitely. Probably nowhere on earth can the temperature change so rapidly. They had their radio on Christmas day, listening to the frost warnings from Pomona, California. The temperature in Azusa, California, was 29 and the temperature at their winter camp in Alaska that night was 36 above zero. A few weeks later it was 50 below zero.

There were times during this severe weather when Van Dyke ventured out with his crew when even the Eskimos wouldn't go outside. The elements and laws of the north be damned, if the light was right, and the ice was right, that was the important thing and the gang worked. Time after time he did things no one living in the Arctic would have attempted to do. The winter freeze almost cost him his own life. Eddie Hearn went to Van's cabin early one morning, as customary, to see if there were any special orders for the day. He knocked on the door but there was no answer. This was unusual, for Van Dyke always responded immediately. He knocked again and upon hearing no response opened the door and entered the cabin. Woody was in bed, so desperately ill and weak with fever that he could barely speak. He told Hearn he had had a tough night but with the help of the Good Lord and his desire to see the job completed, he just had to pull through. He inquired about the weather and was told it was just what they had been waiting for. Despite his illness, minimizing his own condition, Van Dyke got up, dressed and personally supervised the shots he had been waiting to get. Whether in Africa, the South Seas, the California Desert, or Alaska, he never changed his perspective. He seemed to have a sense of power behind him that few men visibly or instinctively express. He never feared trying anything that he felt was a right thing to do.

Patience is invaluable on location trips, especially when the location is Alaska in the winter time. Van wanted to catch a scene of the ice floes, but he also wanted visibility clear enough to get the mountains and glaciers as background. The snow was so dry the wind kept the atmosphere hazy with "snowdust" and the mountains were rarely visible. Patience always had its reward and a clear day came, and a unit was on the spot instantly to make the take. The scene was to depict the haunts of the polar bear where no white man sets foot. The atmosphere was crystal clear, the light just right and to top it off, as if Van had set up a wind machine himself to produce the effect, a fresh little eddy of breeze came up in back of the camera, blowing the loose snow down the ice right in front of the lens. "Old Mother Nature" was surely lending a hand. The crew couldn't possibly have worked out a better effect. There in the distance, miles away, and sparkling like blue white diamonds, were the mountains and glaciers. What a shot! Van Dyke was delighted. The cameras were grinding away when an unexpected, "Well, I'll be damned!" rang through the air. Van dropped his gaze from the distant mountain peak and there before the camera, bouncing down the ice having a whale of a time, was a hat — an old felt hat that only a white man would wear. He yelled "Cut!" and then before the unhappy owner could retrieve his topper, the wind began to howl and the mountains and glaciers vanished as "snowdust" filled the air. It was as if "Old Mother Nature" had imbibed the spirit of the gang and was playing a few jokes herself. She had given them a perfect day with visibility covering hundreds of square miles, a set that no mere man could possibly dress . . . had provided a lighting effect that all the electricians in the studios could not have produced . . . even the brisk little breeze at the base of the tripod to get that artistic touch. Then, like a clown, she had flipped a crew member's hat right down the path of the camera lens, and howled, like Van Dyke would have laughed at one of his own pranks. The crew had to wait five more days for the weather to clear up. This time the company worked without hats!

An important action sequence in the film called for a walrus hunt. This opened with TAKE 35. Much preparation had been made for this scene before Van let the cameras turn. Mala's older boy, Orsokidok, is standing on a rise on a hill, looking out to sea. Suddenly his eyes widen. A mile from shore are several ice pans, rising and falling in the swell. Tiny black spots are moving on them. The Eskimo boy breaks into a shout, "Awar Sooit!" Walrus! Big ones! Mala is greatly excited and shouts orders to the villagers. He slings his bow on his back and takes his harpoon and spear and dashes to the large oomiak being put into the water. Men rush to join him, carrying spears, harpoons, line, and "bladder buoys." Mala pulls some hair from his parka, letting it float away to get the direction of the wind so that the beasts will not scent them.

The Eskimos approach the largest ice pan on which part of the walrus herd is lying. One old bull raises his head, but fails to detect them. The men land and crawl cautiously over the ice. With a rush they dash forward! The beasts raise their cumbersome bodies in terror, but too late. Arrows fly! Harpoons flash! Several of the huge beasts are pierced and flounder about, trying to get into the water as the men rush forward to finish the job. An Eskimo near the camera plunges his harpoon into a big bull as it splashes into the water. The line goes out and he throws the bladder buoy after it. The men now take to their kayaks and oomiaks and start after the herd in the water. A wounded walrus comes up beside one boat. An Eskimo lunges at him with his harpoon but misses. The walrus charges the large oomiak, lunging its tusks over the gunwhale and with a vicious wrench and roar capsizes the boat, toppling the crew into the icy water. Mala wheels his kayak about and dashes to their assistance. Other Eskimos come to the rescue and help the men to safety, pulling the capsized boat up on the ice. Van Dyke had asked for action, and he got plenty of it. The Eskimos enjoyed making these particular scenes. Other thrilling episodes photographed for the picture included the harpooning of a whale from an oomiak . . . spearing a polar bear . . . trapping and killing with bow and arrows several caribou that had been stampeded into a river.

Even though facing such tasks as these, the men were not without their sense of humor: "Pop" Arnold, trustworthy grip for Van Dyke on all of his expeditions, started to grow a beard. Van made a fifty dollar bet with him that he would shave it off before the company arrived back home. Arnold took his boss up on the deal. During the winter the moisture from his breath would freeze his beard and it was necessary for him to thaw it out before he could eat his meals. Despite the fact that he had to go through this ordeal every day, he stuck it out!

During the fall and winter when any member of the crew left the winter quarters they had to check in and out. One evening Mrs. Andersen — "Loretta" to the gang — gave the entire company a party at their home in Teller, which was about three and a half miles across the ice of the harbor from the M-G-M headquarters. After the party was over and everyone had left, Jack and Loretta were about to lock up and retire when they heard someone snoring. Jack commenced to search the premises and to his surprise, sitting on the floor in back of a large overstuffed chair, fully clothed in fur parka, mittens and muk-luks, ready for the trail, was Ray Wise (Mala), the leading man, sound asleep. While waiting for the others to depart in one of those long, drawn-out "goodnight" affairs, he had fallen asleep and they had left without him. He was not intoxicated, just full of good home-cooked food and awfully sleepy. While Jack and Loretta were discussing by what means of transportation they could get him back to headquarters, a searching party arrived and Van Dyke was much relieved to find his Mala Number Two safe and sound.

One evening, for diversion, they had a picture show for the Eskimos on board the schooner Nanuk. They showed "Trader Horn." Some of the Eskimos had never been outside of the boundaries of their own world. When they saw all of those African lions and other beasts and carefully pondered it all, they merely shook their heads and said, "We see 'em all right, but just the same, she is one big lie." Van Dyke said to watch the reaction of the Eskimos while looking at the picture was the greatest show he had ever seen.

Another time, a bunch of the boys were out hunting and got stranded on an ice floe when the ice separated and started to float away. They had no food and began to get hungry. Captain Peter Freuchen and some Eskimos taught them an old native trick, which is not the most pleasant thought, but it kept them from starving . . . they slit the throat of a walrus and showed them how to drink the warm blood. Several of the studio boys didn't like the idea at first, but when they got cold and hungry enough, they said it even tasted better than cream of chicken soup. If it hadn't been for men like Freuchen, who knew the Artic inside out, and Ray Wise (Mala) who was part Eskimo himself, Van Dyke said they would have been stumped more than once. But at its best, he claimed the frozen North is the dirtiest, most evil smelling, dangerous, heartbreaking place on the face of the earth.

The following entries copied from the SS Nanuk's official ship's log indicate the unpredictable weather and conditions which made for constant problems and necessitated almost daily changes in plans:

October 18, 1932: "Grantley Harbor covered by young ice. Impossible to get ashore with small boat."

October 30, 1932: "Ship drifting with ice in Grantley Harbor. 8:30 A.M. started blasting and cutting ice around ship. 9:00 A.M. gang of eight men came from shore to give a hand. 4:00 P.M. out of ice and back in our old position. Ship drifted eight miles during night and day. Fresh North wind."

November 23, 1932: "An explosion of a blow torch ignited chief engineer George Hunter's clothing, causing severe burns about neck and face. Fire in engine room put out with chemical extinguishers. Mr. Hunter sent to Nome by plane immediately for medical treatment. First aid treatment given on board. Jerry Jones pilot of plane."

December 8, 1932: "Strong S.E. wind started to blow yesterday going up rapidly. During night wind increased to heavy gale force with rain. This morning the whole Grantley Harbor was covered with water on top of the ice. Everything outside the ship was afloat. Doghouses and toilet. All the 'igloos' that took us two weeks to build are down and out. The snow ashore is gone and ground bare again. Took dogs aboard and chopped several holes in the ice so the water can drain off. Barometer 29.40. Temperature 38 degrees above zero."

There were other interesting entries in the Nanuk's log, each with a story behind it. On August 1, 1932, while the company was hunting locations, the log reads, "4 P.M. Got our first polar bear. Mr. Messenger lassoed him in the water. Got lots of good pictures." Then the log of the next day, August 2, reads: "7 P.M. Spotted a bear on an ice floe. Eskimos in skinboat harpooned him."

August 11, 1932, the log reads: "8 A.M. Fast to ice floe. N.N.W. wind. Rain and fog. 12 Noon fog lifted. Filming walrus. Killed twenty walrus and loaded aboard." The next day they continued their hunt, killing six more walrus and took the skins aboard.

The *Nanuk's* log had few entries from January to May 8, 1933. Temperature ranged as low as 50 degrees below zero in mid-winter. With the variable temperatures, winds, tides and the hardships, cold and hunger as a result, Van Dyke said the Eskimos were the most wonderful people he had ever seen. To his way of thinking, they had absolutely nothing to be happy about, and yet were always happy. He often said a lot of people could learn a great lesson from the Eskimos.

As in Wyoming on the Wind River Indian Reservation, Tahiti, and the South Seas, and Africa, Van had learned some of the language of the natives to enjoy talking with them, so in Alaska he had picked up enough words to make friends with the Eskimos. He worked with "ugloakruks" (cameras), drank "pontas" (coffee), greeted them with "camookittitch" (how are you), said "teeyatktookfailyear-ughmooten" (goodbye), see you out "fahngahmoon" (in front), and "kih" (all ready) when set to shoot a scene.

The "Eskimo" expedition was really no small one. Despite the fact that it was made at a time — 1932 — when the national economy was at its "mean low ebb" as a result of the crash of '29, Van Dyke had spared no expense in providing the best for all who made the trip. It cost the studio $1,600 per person just to outfit him with clothing and gear. Each member of the company got the same equipment, with no exceptions.

While Woody did enjoy some of the trip, for the most part he hated every minute of it. There wasn't a day but marked some sacrifice and hardly a minute but that some member of the crew's morale dropped to a new low. Like the time Mike Phillips slipped off an ice cake into the water and his clothes froze stiff the instant he was pulled out. They had to load him on a dog sled like a chunk of ice and send him back to the ship to thaw out.

They learned what the saying "the wolf at the door" really meant, for there were packs of them mad with hunger. But despite all of these things, the company got through the trip with only a few minor accidents and without the loss of a single man.

Van Dyke had planned on two ships, one for the cast and crew, and one for the equipment. They could find only one ship suitable to make the trip so they had purchased the three-masted schooner, "*Nanuk*." The ship had sailed from Seattle for Nome in April of 1932. En route they broke a boom and stood in to Dutch Harbor for repairs. While in Dutch Harbor, the crew met the U. S. Army's wireless operator, a sergeant, and his helper. A great number of Japanese fishing vessels were in this harbor at the time and they inquired about them. They were told the Japs were fishing in great numbers all through that area. While off the coast of Siberia later on, Van Dyke noticed much activity of Japanese fishermen and their boats in these waters. Upon seeing a large Japanese vessel put in one time and knowing they were not fishing, Van Dyke inquired why they were there. He was told by the Japs that they were sailing the great circle route and that was their course. He wrote to Washington about his observations, the results of which were instrumental in increased Naval Operations and Army Ground Activities in that vicinity in the succeeding years.

Upon the "Eskimo" unit's return to Hollywood, the schooner Nanuk was sailed to San Pedro where she was later stripped of all her gear and transformed into the fighting ship "Bounty" for "Mutiny on the Bounty." She subsequently changed "face" on several other occasions.

The picture "Eskimo" was released in the United States in the summer of 1933. Many who saw the show claimed it to be one of the most beautiful films ever made from the standpoint of photography and directorial achievement. The British had a very successful run with the film. Not thinking that the title "Eskimo" had much appeal, they changed it to "Mala, the Magnificent" and played to capacity crowds at the Savoy in London.

Van Dyke was profound in his praise and gratitude for Freuchen and Ray Wise, for Clyde De Vinna, Bob Roberts and Dale Deverman, cameramen; for Harry Albiez and "Pop" Arnold for their humor and hard work; for Jerry Jones who flew supplies to them from Nome; for Emil Ottinger, their cook who could turn out flapjacks even when seasick and all the rest of the gang which Van Dyke said was the finest bunch he ever worked with.

However, there was still one bit of unfinished business — "Pop" Arnold's beard and the fifty dollar bet. Arnold still had his beard but Van Dyke told him not to shave it off as he had a picture coming up soon that he could use Arnold in, beard and all. This went on for several weeks after their return to Hollywood, with Van Dyke taking Pop to numerous public affairs. Pop soon caught on that Van Dyke was just making him keep the beard on a little longer and the studio barber put an end to that the next day. Woody gladly paid the fifty dollars.

Chapter 24

TROPHY ROOM

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

Trophy Room

Van Dyke was unpacking several boxes in the trophy room of his new Brentwood home. It was the first chance he had to relax since returning from Alaska. He was trying to find places for Arctic souvenirs among the colorful grasses and vivid cloth hangings which brought back memories of "The Pagan" and "White Shadows in the South Seas," and among the barbaric headdress and native drums of Africa, mementos of the months spent in the jungles filming "Trader Horn."

"I never knew home could look so good," he said. There was an informal gathering in Van's den. A few close friends were aiding in unpacking and rearranging the room. Woody's Brentwood Heights home already looked as if it might be an annex to the Smithsonian Institute or the British Museum. Arts and artifacts from the California desert, the Belgian Congo, the South Seas and, now, trophies from the frozen North.

In making the rounds of his house, which had already been added onto twice to make room for his curios, they rearranged ancient Indian arrowheads and modern Indian basketry from Wyoming and northern Arizona. From the South Seas, there were native idols in wood and stone, tapa cloth and fish spears. The serrated jaws of a giant shark hung on one wall. Most of his animal trophies were from Africa, beasts that he himself had shot. In moving the vicious looking snout of a rhino, Van said, "This is the hook of that horned nose baboon that almost upset our camera car in Africa." Looking down from over the fireplace was the huge head and horns of the Cape Buffalo with black, beady eyes. On the floor were lion skin rugs, leopard pelts and zebra skins. That hartebeest, Van Dyke told guests, was the one that took eleven shots before he finally brought it down. There were leather shields, African jewelry and plumed head gear. The chief's headdresses each had 195 ostrich plumes and the large war drum presented to Van by the tribesmen was a piece any museum would prize. Lawrence Tibbett used this huge drum in a concert in the East, during which time it was insured for five thousand dollars.

Unpacking a magnificent polar bear skin, they added it to the already adorned hardwood floor. More boxes and Arctic harpoons, carved walrus-ivory implements. More skins, caribou, wolf and seal. There was a prize set of Eskimo surgical instruments, carved from bone. The Eskimos, Van Dyke explained, use ice to anaesthetize a wound and then operate with these implements, extracting small harpoon barbs, etc. Another interesting gadget was an Eskimo fire drill.

Woody's most prized possession was the neat rack of guns. Everything from the heavy English elephant gun to a beautiful, small, high-powered English rifle which was Van Dyke's favorite. Major Dickinson had procured this gun for him in Africa.

Getting back to Alaska, one of the party asked Van Dyke if it was really tough up there. "It certainly was," he said. "We managed to be pretty comfortable, but it wasn't home!" He told them of the long trips on sleds, carrying sound truck and cameras across snowy miles; moisture freezing eyelashes so that it was impossible to see; little wooden shacks where the heat rose to the roof so that your head was burning when you stood up and your body was numb with cold when you sat down; heavy fur garments, hard to manage for the novice, but comfortable; unexpectedly frozen faces. He told, too, of trailing reindeer and bringing them down; shooting walrus with elephant guns brought from Africa; shadow-boxing and taking setting-up exercises in order to keep the blood circulating on days when it was impossible to "shoot"; eating countless pounds of fruits and vegetables in order to prevent scurvy, the dread disease of the Arctic; settling disputes and quarrels among nerve-wracked, homesick men; betting on football games while the cold wind howled outside the little "bungalows"; trying to speak a few words of Eskimauan to the fur-clad visitors who came to watch and help in the making of this story of their people and land . . . a thousand details of an exciting trip, told calmly by a man who saw it only as a job well done, and not as an adventure.

Van Dyke's hand-picked crew of seventeen men had gone into the Arctic and brought back on film its white, monotonous beauty, mystery and drama — a story of the loves and hates of a primitive people in a cruel, hard, relentless land.

One member of the party asked Van Dyke if he thought Ray Wise would get ahead in pictures because of the fine performance he had given as Mala, the lead, in "Eskimo." Van replied, "I don't think so, and it's really too bad." Asked what he meant, he continued, "He's a type, and in the movies that's bad. Mala not only will be established in the minds of the people as an Eskimo — he actually is part Eskimo. Even if a professional actor does exceedingly well in a character study, the audience wants to see him in that kind of a role from then on." To further illustrate this point, Van Dyke said, "Take Myrna Loy, for instance. She did an exceptionally fine job of portraying an oriental siren and that's all she's been doing ever since. The audience, as well as many producers, think that's all she can do. In Myrna's case, the problem exists only in the minds of the audience and the producers themselves. I think that situation could be broken if she were given the right opportunity, and I'm going to see if something can't be done about it."

Chapter 25

MYRNA LOY

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Myrna Loy

Myrna Loy was worried over her new assignment. It was the feminine lead in "Penthouse," co-starring Warner Baxter. Miss Loy was so active in portraying siren parts she had acquired numerous books to study the various characters, customs and habits of Chinese, Malayan, Japanese and Polynesian women — all types she played. She was dubious because the part in "Penthouse" was entirely different from these character studies. But, even more frightening, was the thought of having as director that hard-boiled adventurer just returned from hunting walrus and polar bear in the Arctic. She was skeptical and uneasy as she reported to the stage for work the first day of shooting.

A good-looking and tall man stood just to the left of the camera. He wore a green sun visor. One foot rested on the arm of the director's chair as he crisply gave orders to get more light on the stage. Myrna's pulse quickened as she read the name on the back of that chair — W. S. VAN DYKE.

"Miss Loy is here, sir!" an assistant said. Van Dyke turned quickly and with hand extended came over to greet her. He had a most infectious smile. "Hi Honey!" was all that he said, and then called out to his crew, "Okay, gang. Let's go!"

Accustomed to having scenes shot over and over again in her oriental parts, to get the proper mood, Myrna started acting and became dramatic in her work. Van Dyke stopped the cameras quickly. "Ah, that's a lot of nonsense, Myrna. You don't have to act!" She was startled at his frankness, but he was so sure of himself he gave her confidence and she listened. "If you will just be your own, natural, sweet self, you'll be a sensation." His warm smile made her feel perfectly at ease, though the circumstances were quite shocking. "This part," he continued, "calls for a typical American girl and you're certainly the type yourself, Myrna, and that's what I want."

She didn't have a chance to speak before Woody was shooting again. He now seemed deliberately to place her in situations that had not been rehearsed. She didn't have time to figure out a scene. Sometimes, on the surface, Van Dyke was very severe. Then she recognized he wasn't going to all this trouble without a specific purpose. She was being scrutinized . . . tested . . . to see how she would react. And, to Van Dyke's delight, she always responded. The scenes played naturally and freely, and to her own astonishment, Myrna Loy, who had always required six and eight takes, found herself doing scenes in one take only. Van didn't even let her try a second one on any shot.

It was as the feminine lead in "The Mask of Fu Manchu" that Myrna Loy had been typed an oriental. But no more oriental roles from now on for her, said Van Dyke. Just plain American womanhood. Before the final scenes of "Penthouse" were on film, Van told her she would be doing important starring roles within a year. She thought he was just giving her the usual line that goes with the business, but it wasn't long before she found here was a man who meant what he said.

This had all taken place in June, 1933. Shortly after the Alaskan picture had been completed, Van Dyke had gone to the front office and told them what he thought of Miss Loy's possibilities, and they had given him the opportunity to find out.

Immediately after the completion of "Penthouse," Van went directly to Mr. Mayer and Eddie Mannix and told them Myrna Loy would be one of the most popular feminine stars on the screen if they would continue to give her these American girl parts. They didn't question him.

There were several cans of film on a table in Mr. Mayer's office. Louis B. walked over to these and said, "Van Dyke, you've just got yourself another assignment. I'd like to have you doctor up this picture! Van Dyke said, "What is it?" Mr. Mayer explained that it was "The Prizefighter and the Lady." The film was sent to a projection room and after looking at it, Van told Mayer he would fix it up. L. B. was delighted. Van Dyke picked up the several cans of film and left the chief executive's office. In a few minutes Mr. Mayer heard someone calling him from outside his window. Surprised at this unusual occurrence, he went to the window to see who could possibly be so bold. It was Van Dyke. He had the lid off a large disposal can and called . . . " I told you I'd fix it!" and dumped the entire batch of film in the trash. Mr. Mayer almost had palpitation of the heart. But Van smiled, as he continued, "It'll be cheaper to start the whole picture over from scratch." Van Dyke accepted the job and Myrna Loy found herself the "Lady" in the play.

The studio had been having trouble with Primo Carnera and Max Baer in the picture, so Van called his old friend, Jack Dempsey, and asked him to straighten the fellows out. Jack was successful and Van Dyke gave him a part in the show. He told Jack it would be a good idea for him to stick around just in case . . . that with all the pugilists in the cast, if a battle royal broke out, Dempsey would make good interference, so he cast Jack as the referee.

From penthouse to pugilists! Myrna Loy thought she had had her problems in "Penthouse" but when she found herself in the middle of "The Prizefighter and the Lady" with Van Dyke, Max Baer, Jack Dempsey, and Primo Carnera, plus a dozen other ex-champions, she really began to know what trouble was. She was the only woman in the cast and these big bruisers teased the life out of her. She was rapidly becoming transformed into an honest-to-goodness American girl. One day when the large arena stage was filled to capacity for a fight scene, Max Baer wired her chair. Completely unaware, Myrna nonchalantly sat down on the chair just as the assistant director called over the loud speaker, "Quiet, please!" There was a scream and Myrna practically jumped out of her skin. Max Baer roared, as did everyone else. Van soon had them calmed down and at work. When everything was normal, Dempsey offered Myrna a cigarette. She thanked him sweetly and Van Dyke gave her a light. BANG! . . . the cigarette blew up in her face. This tickled Max Baer and he howled again. Van smiled and in a few moments they were shooting another scene. He was watching his leading lady's reaction every second to be sure they didn't overplay their hands. Thus far, their tomfoolery had resulted only in a freedom that revealed the many talents Myrna really had.

But Myrna wasn't the goat all of the time. She discovered that Max Baer had a phobia for mice. He would literally jump out of his shoes if anybody hollered "mouse." She scouted all over town, finally locating a life-size toy mouse that, when wound up, would jump a foot in the air like a real one does when cornered. The company was again working on the arena stage. Everybody was there. The bleachers were packed with hundreds of extras. Van Dyke, with microphone in hand, was instructing the crowd . . . "This is the championship fight," he said, "make it sound like one. I want plenty of noise and commotion!" Myrna, at the ringside, had a twinkle in her eyes. "Lay-deez and Gentlemen!" Dan Tobey was speaking. He introduced the two contenders. Max Baer and Primo Carnera came to the center of the ring. The crowd roared. Referee Jack Dempsey, after giving them their instructions, said, "Go to your corners, men, and come out fighting!" Myrna's hand slipped into her purse. The timekeeper hit the bell. "Round One" flashed on the board. Just as the two fighters, with blood in their eyes, started to the center of the ring, Myrna Loy let out a scream. Max Baer, startled, turned and saw her point to the canvas. The mouse jumped and Baer leaped into Primo Carnera's arms. The crowd almost blew the roof off the stage with laughter. Van Dyke, weak from laughing, had to sit down. He asked for commotion — he got it! His leading lady smiled innocently, wrinkled up her nose and said, "I'm just a typical American girl . . . huh . . . Van Dyke?" The prizefighters and Mr. Van Dyke let the "Lady" alone after that.

Van Dyke's prediction came true. In less than a year Myrna Loy had an important starring role. She was given the lead opposite Clark Gable in "Manhattan Melodrama" — Van Dyke directing. This was a thrilling gangster picture. The action was so realistic that Dillinger himself came out of hiding to see it and he was killed by the F.B.I. in a gun fight in front of the theatre after the show. It was in this picture, also, that Van recognized the ability of another actor, William Powell, who played the part of the attorney. He was so suave and teamed up so well with Myrna Loy in "Manhattan Melodrama" that it gave Van Dyke an idea. Up to this time, matrimonial bliss had not been a subject featured on the screen. Most films concluded with the ceremony and "They lived happily ever after. . . . " It would be a new twist to play up bliss after marriage, Van thought. If he could find a vehicle to team these two, he felt certain they would be a hit — a sort of Mr. and Mrs. America.

Chapter 26

PHILO VANCE BECOMES NICK CHARLES

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

Philo Vance Becomes Nick Charles

Digging through the studio's library of story properties, Van Dyke happened on "The Thin Man," by Dashiell Hammett. Woody had always had a yen for detective yarns; he read them by the dozen, and wrote a few himself. He picked up the manuscript and started thumbing through the pages quickly. He stopped at a page and started to read. It was the story of private detective Nick Charles and his wife. "That's it!" he said as he snapped his fingers, "Mr. and Mrs. Nicky Charles." Van immediately went to the front office and told them he wanted to do "The Thin Man." The idea didn't get over so well.

No business runs a greater risk than the movies in its product. Its market, called the box office, fluctuates with the times and it takes a smart front office to pick the right stories at the right time. Van's selection was not a good one, they contended. Warner Brothers and Paramount studios had been making the Philo Vance stories as a detective series for several years. "The Thin Man" was similar in character to Philo Vance and the market for that type of story had been pretty well played out. It certainly wouldn't be wise to bring out another such story at the present time. And, too, at best it was only material for a good "B" picture;

Van Dyke was one of the top directors in town and they didn't want to waste his talents on such an ordinary story. But Woody couldn't be talked down. It wasn't the detective angle he was thinking of at all — the characters in the story were the important thing. He told L. B. Mayer that all he wanted was a series of six or seven cute homey scenes between husband and wife — Mr. and Mrs. Nicky Charles — and the interruptions of their matrimonial bliss as a result of the Mr.'s being a private sleuth. Van Dyke's Dutch persisted and he was assigned two writers — Albert Hackett and Frances Goodrich — to work out the scenes he wanted. Reams of manuscript were thrown out of his office in the next few weeks until he finally had what he wanted. Mr. Mayer and Eddie Mannix were delighted with the material. "But," somebody said, "who's going to be Nick Charles?" "I was afraid somebody might ask that question," Woody replied.

"Who?"

"William Powell!"

"William Powell?" went the yells. "Why, he's been Philo Vance for years!" "He's played that part so long," said a producer, "theatre managers have been putting the name Philo Vance on their marquees instead of William Powell!"

"Surely you're not serious, Van?" said another.

Woody found himself up against a stone wall. By all manner of sensible reasoning, their objections were justified.

Other elements then began to creep into the meeting. To some, Van Dyke himself had been typed as a globe-trotter or adventure director. They were for him a hundred percent when it came to that kind of picture and agreed he was the best in that line . . . even his action racket-busting yarns like "Penthouse" and "Manhattan Melodrama" were great . . . but certainly he was not the man to direct a light, sophisticated comedy such as was written in the six scenes between "Mr. and Mrs. Charles." To come out on top in one of these meetings one had to have the stability of the Rock of Gibraltar. Van did . . . plus the confidence of the head man at M-G-M. Louis B. Mayer's ability to sense good ideas quickly was almost uncanny. "Okay, Van," he said, and Philo Vance became Nick Charles in "The Thin Man."

Woody was delighted. He had recognized in Powell's excellent performance in "Manhattan Melodrama" the character qualifications he wanted. But, even more than this, he knew the actor well as a friend. There was a charm and friendliness about Bill Powell that made him one of the most popular hosts in town. That was the man Van Dyke wanted on the screen, and that was the Powell he was going to get.

Woody had known all along who was to be Mrs. Nicky Charles. His thoughts now turned to her. He worked out a great entrance for Myrna Loy in this picture, but waited until the first day on the set to tell her about it.

What would Van Dyke do with this brain child . . . was the topic of conversation all over the lot. An unusually large crowd gathered on the stage the first day to see. The first take was made with William Powell. Van said, "Bill, take this cocktail shaker . . . go behind the bar . . . and just walk through the opening scene. I want to check sound and lights before we make a take." Bill stepped behind the bar, the other members of the cast took their places, and one of the most beautiful ad libs ever enacted came off perfectly. "That's it!" Van Dyke said, as he snapped his fingers. "Print it!"

William Powell turned, "What did you say?"

"Print it," Van Dyke repeated.

"Do you mean to tell me that you shot that scene?"

"I sure did, and it was the best take you ever made, you big stiff!" Van Dyke knew that he was going to make the shot and had done this so as to catch Powell off guard and keep him from injecting any Philo Vance into the role.

That started off the greatest exhibition of team work and improvisation ever experienced in the making of any one movie. Even Dashiell Hammett had now joined the unit and entered into the fun. The whole company seemed to catch the spirit of the story instantly. Van turned to Myrna and said, "Now, honey, this is supposed to be Christmas Eve and you've been Christmas shopping. Your husband, Nicky Charles, has been bragging about you to those highbrow dames at the hotel bar. He's told them that he married you for your money; that you're the most sophisticated of sophisticates, and will be along any minute now. They're dying to meet you." Van had Myrna by the arm and they were walking toward the revolving doors of the hotel lobby set. The cocktail bar was across the lobby and could be seen from the door. "Your arms are full of packages," he continued. "You can't see where you're going. Asta, your little dog, is leading the way. You start across the lobby like this," — Van walked across the stage. "Your husband sees you and says, 'Here she comes now.' You trip and sprawl on your face on the floor, bundles and all."

"Now, really, Mr. Van Dyke," said Myrna, "my Mack Sennett training has been brief, you know!" At first she thought Van was kidding but then realized he was serious. By now, she had implicit confidence in him, so she said, "If that's what you want, pile on the bundles!" To be sure that Mrs. Nicky Charles' first appearance in "The Thin Man" was ultra-informal, he gave Harry Albiez — property man — the high sign and Harry loaded her arms so full of

"Pop" Arnold with the frozen beard that won him fifty dollars from Van **Dyke.**

Jess Willard, Max Baer, Van Dyke, Jim Jeffries, Jack Dempsey, and Primo Carnera on "the Prizefighter and the Lady" set at MGM studio.

William Powell and Myrna Loy in the roles of Mr. and Mrs. Nick Charles with which Van Dyke made them box office champions.

bundles she had a hard time holding on to them, let alone seeing where she was going. "Hit 'em," cried an assistant, and lights came on. "Turn 'em over," and a man held a slate before the camera for a few moments . . . TAKE 25 — THIN MAN — VAN DYKE. "Okay for sound, Mr. Van Dyke," said another voice and Woody called out, "All right, Myrna, make it look good now, honey!" There was a terrible commotion off scene . . . a dog barking excitedly . . . men's voices raised in protestation . . . and a woman's voice pitched high above it all. "Asta! Where are you going? Asta!!!" All eyes in the hotel lobby turn toward the commotion at the door. Myrna Loy, bundles, and Asta hit the revolving doors at the same time. She spins through them . . . a tremendously vital person . . . interested in everybody and everything, including the doorman and hat check clerk following her through the doors. Her arms are stacked with packages. Her hat askew. She is being pulled bodily along by the small wire-haired terrier on the leash. The doorman and hat check clerk are trying to stop her . . . "But, Madam — you can't bring that dog in here!" they protest. "I'm not. He's bringing *me*! . . . Asta! ASTA!!" But Asta pays no attention, as he makes a final leap in the direction of his owner who is attracting his attention off scene. Packages fly, and are left in a trail, as Myrna trips, and says to herself, "Well, here goes." She falls flat on her face and is traveling so fast she slides across the floor on her stomach. The camera tracks her across the lobby . . . pans around . . . and catches her face just as she pushes up her hat from her chin. She looks up with a silly little grin, and there standing before her is Nick with Asta in his arms. He introduces his wife to his friends.

"Cut" called Van Dyke, and his entire crew howled. "That was great," he said.

Every scene in the picture had the same flavor. No company ever had more fun making a movie. Almost every shot was improvised as they went along. While the crew decorated the Christmas tree for a scene, Bill Powell picked up a B-B gun that was on a table of props, and shot some of the glass ornaments out of Harry Albiez's hands. Woody laughed, "That's good . . . let's put it in the picture." In a few minutes Myrna Loy climbed the ladder and started hanging ornaments on the tree. Every time she got one secure, the camera panned to Nicky, who was lying on the davenport on his back, legs up in the air. He would guide the barrel of the air-gun with his feet . . . take steady aim . . . and, POP, would go Mrs. Nicky's ornament.

Another on-the-spur-of-the-moment touch was the scene in which Mr. and Mrs. Nick Charles took Asta out for a walk. The camera only caught them from the waist up. A leash was visible in Nicky's hand and it was apparent Asta was pulling on it strongly as all wire-haired terriers do. A tree, or lamp post, would pass the camera lens and Mr. and Mrs. Charles would come to an abrupt about-face, as the leash whizzed back toward the lamp post. Mr. and Mrs. Nicky would smile at each other for a moment or two, and the leash would pull them about again as the threesome walked briefly down the avenue until another lamp post passed the camera lens.

The company rushed through these scenes one after another and in the almost unbelievably short time of sixteen days, the first "Thin Man" was on film. It was "sneak previewed" in Pomona and the audience reaction was phenomenal. The film not only skyrocketed William Powell and Myrna Loy to the bracket of box office champions, but it also glorified the right kind of matrimonial bliss.

Van, Myrna and Bill had caught the charm of married life and showed through these characters that the really important things in living don't cease after marriage. The affection, tolerance, love and the fears of these two people actually mirrored the lives, loves, tolerance and fears of millions of Americans.

Chapter 27

"WALTER WINCHELL" FOR A DAY

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

"Walter Winchell" For A Day

"Hollywood's Tough Guy" . . . Florence Thomas, Van's executive secretary, smiled quizzically as she glanced at the headline in a current issue of *Film Weekly* lying on Mr. Van Dyke's desk. The director's secretary thought how few people really knew her employer. She placed a single rose in the tall thin vase on his desk. This formality was observed each morning at the request of Van's mother, who had a standing order with a florist that the flower be on her son's desk each day, before his arrival at the studio. Miss Thomas picked up the *Weekly* and scanned the article . . . "Hollywood's Tough Guy. That's about the best description you could find for W. S. Van Dyke, the director who preaches and practices the spanking of recalcitrant leading ladies, the man who started a whole film tradition when he directed 'The Thin Man'."

A telegram interrupted further review of the paper. It was from Walter Winchell asking Van Dyke if he would write his column for one day during the month of July. Woody sent an affirmative reply and subsequently dictated the following copy, which was released through *The Daily Mirror*, Inc. syndicate exactly as submitted:

WALTER WINCHELL

On Broadway

By W. S. Van Dyke II

I said to myself: "Here! You've got a guest column to write! All right! Now in the first place — don't do a guest column! Nothing can look phonier than some halfwit simpering all over himself for a thousand words. Why stick your neck out? Put yourself in the shoe of a man you've asked to be your guest director for a day! What can you possibly have to say, Van Dyke? What would they expect you to say?"

I knew the answer. The minute I knew the answer, I knew what I could write about. COULD write about? WANTED to write about! They'd expect you to write about Adventure. Adventure with a capital A. Alaska! Rich in Romance! Glamour! Big shot director in the Far North filming "Eskimo!" Big shot director in deepest Africa, filming "Trader Horn!"

Nuts! I mean NUTS!

It isn't adventure. It isn't glamorous. I resent the very idea that ninnies think it is. I resent things like that.

I resent simpering idiots who babble about the Artistic Urge in a director's job — a director's job like mine, anyway.

I resent the water buffalo in the Smithsonian Institution — because they are NOT water buffalo! They are Cape Buffalo.

I resent people who say the country is going to the dogs.

I resent New York City — it's too big to suit me — its pace scares me — its elevators give me nightmares.

I resent royalty. And it isn't envy, either, because I'm king of at least six African tribes.

I resent all this junk trout fishing experts advise. I use a bent pin and red flannel. Fish aren't that smart. Experts even more so.

I resent motion picture stars who demand closed sets. I won't direct a picture in which some actor or actress bars the set to visitors.

I resent Athletic Clubs.

I resent pals who can't stay out till the wee hours and then get to work on time in the morning.

I resent people who resent things published about them when the things are true.

I resent a lot of things. I resent them to the point of bitterness. They've been leaky faucets in my mind a long time. I realize now that I'm darned glad to turn the faucets on full blast.

I don't care whether you print this or not. I'm glad of the chance to get them on paper — get them off my mind.

I guess I belong to more clubs and organizations of one kind or another than a traveling salesman. I don't know why I joined them. It makes me resentful just to think of it. When I remember that I belong to four — FOUR — Athletic Clubs — ah nuts! NUTS!

They try to build me up at M-G-M as a great artist — they flute melodiously about artistry inherent in me as a director — when THEY know — and I know — that I'm a darned good commercial director. When it comes to turning out a picture with sound commercial possibilities, I can turn the trick. I can do a bang-up job for them. It's my job. Look at "The Thin Man." Look at —

Maybe I've pulled this thing too far. Maybe you think I'm being daring, or something. Trying reverse English to gain the old, old effect of a smoothly worked buildup for myself.

I did go to Alaska. We did spend a long time up there locked in by the ice. The temperature did go to 60 below. The many dangers of the North were always menacing us. BUT WE ALL CAME BACK ALIVE! NONE OF US WAS SERIOUSLY INJURED!

That's not adventure. That's organization. That's meeting unpleasant circumstances and often grave dangers by the simple exercise of common sense. By strict discipline. We could set up the whole Alaska scene right here in the studios tomorrow. Sixty below zero, crushing ice, blizzards and all. And if we did, it would be my duty to see that none of the performers or technicians got hurt. What's the difference whether it's in the studio or in Alaska? Where's your adventure?

Thrills? No! Fright? Yes! When we boarded the northbound train, the wives and sweethearts and sisters of the crew were right there at the depot. They just looked at me. That's all. They didn't have to say, "Take care of him, Woody!"

They just looked at me. Five of the boys were going out in a dogsled for a spin over the ice one day.

I'd ordered everybody to stick to camp. I caught them just in time. A few minutes after — they sitting sullenly in their huts — the ice cracked off a hunk the size of Manhattan Island directly along the route they had chosen. I get weak even now, thinking about it. Imagine me facing the women folk of those five men. Sound like adventure?

Another halfwit, still working right here at M-G-M as an assistant director, disobeyed one day and wandered off with a sled. He was gone as I came out of my cabin after putting away the barometer that had just told me there was a blizzard upcoming. There wasn't anything I could do. The blizzard came on. You couldn't see ten feet. You couldn't hear a cannon. Just like that. The whole camp went through a nightmare of anguish for the kid. Blind luck guided him to our ship, tilted in the ice, six miles from camp. He ran right into the side of the icelocked vessel. He had a wife. He'd been married three months when we started out from Los Angeles. Do you think it was adventure to sit there gnawing my knuckles impotently, sick with the knowledge that he was frozen to death? You should have heard what I told him when he showed up!

What kind of fun do you think trips like that are? What the hell IS this adventure business, anyhow?

I resent fakes. The world is full of fakes. I resent gush. Hollywood is full of gush. I resent publicity tripe. I resent incompetency — no matter how highly it is paid.

I like a column with facts. Directness. Honesty.
That seems to be your kind of column.
I've tried to make this — that way!

> Maybe you'll publish it. Maybe you'll just file it. Either way, you'll have to read it. Either way there'll be at least ONE person who knows how a Hollywood director REALLY feels!

Said Walter Winchell upon reading the column, "Van Dyke speaks bluntly, doesn't he?" The columnist then sent Woody a clipping of the published column and in jest blue-penciled across the face, "Why don't you try Doctor Carter's Little Liver Pills!"

Few people understood Van Dyke's resentment . . . it wasn't tainted with the venom of hate. Van just didn't agree with the things he said he "resented" — he rebuked them, and wasn't afraid to do so. He dared to stand in glass houses and throw stones, if throwing stones meant telling the truth. Van Dyke's life preserver was that he had no ego. He never had gone up in his own estimation, so he never had to come down. This was why he could challenge other people outwardly and yet not offend them. There was no offense in his attitude. And probably no man challenged the temperament of Hollywood with greater frankness and success. As a director he had discovered early in his movie making that temperament was but another name for describing what he called "occupational egotism." This "disease" was not an individual problem, he claimed. It went with the business and was the direct result of the natural reaction experienced by anyone placed before a camera. Woody knew this reaction was not the private property of any star — male or female — and through experience found that to deflate this occupational egotism was the greatest blessing that could happen to a star, because it always resulted in more freedom in speaking and naturalness in expression.

There was a mistaken conception among some people in Hollywood of Van Dyke's method of working. He appeared not to give a damn, but when he started a picture, the speed with which he worked quickly eliminated any misconception of what appeared to be indifference. This was his way of minding his own business. He never concerned himself with what anybody else was doing. His only concern was knowing what was required of him . . . and then doing it.

Van Dyke was an adventurer, yes . . . and never ceased to challenge unexplored realms, but to have these ventures regarded as "larks" drew a caustic rebuke.

Chapter 28

UNCLE EDDIE

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

Uncle Eddie

Eddie Mannix, Vice President and General Manager of M-G-M, was in the middle of an important meeting with a group of highpowered men who had come out from New York to tell him where to get off. His secretary, Ione Sellers, came in and handed him a note: "J. J. Cohn is on the phone again and insists on talking with you." Cohn is head of production. Knowing something important must have happened, Mr. Mannix asked the gentlemen to excuse him for a minute while he took care of the matter. He flipped one of the numerous buttons on his desk and said, "Yes, J. J." Cohn came back with, "Van Dyke's shooting ahead of schedule again and is screaming his head off because he's run out of sets!" "Okay, okay, J. J." Mannix flipped another button and told his secretary to ask Mr. Van Dyke to report to his office in about thirty minutes.

The Vice President laughed as he said to the gentlemen present, "You should meet this Van Dyke. He's like the captain of a ship. If there's any straightening out to do on one of his pictures he does it and nobody else. If he doesn't know how to straighten it out, nobody else does. But . . . " Mr. Mannix continued, " . . . I never knew of a time when he didn't."

And no one ever knew of a time Eddie Mannix couldn't handle his own affairs. The meeting in his office ended as quickly as it had started, with Mannix still in the driver's seat.

Next to L. B. Mayer, Eddie Mannix has been the most important man at M-G-M- for many years. Vice President and General Manager of the studio, he is the heavy for many of its complicated problems. Mr. Mannix had joined the M-G-M family in 1924. He was sent to the West Coast as a comptroller for Mr. Schenck, to check up on production costs and studio management in general. He immediately became a great force in straightening out grievances and departmental rifts, as well as personnel problems. Soon thereafter he became General Manager and official trouble shooter for the lot. Days in endless succession, grievances and gripes passed through his office from morning until night. While one group was settling contractual differences with a bit of vociferous guff, occasionally resounding through the walls, another group would be waiting their turn in the reception room. Extremely temperamental artists have been known to come to his outer office so excited and upset they couldn't even hold a glass of water. A wise and efficient secretary would interrupt an important conference, and Eddie would go to an adjoining room and in a few minutes have the artist appeased. Probably no industry has more problems and complications, which are the result of big business, temperament and artistry combined, than the Motion Picture Industry.

The modern motion picture studio is a well-organized, highly professionalized, and intricate institution combining the skills and talents of men and women in practically every line of endeavor: literary, architectural, construction, engineering, cinematography, research, sound recording, electrical engineering, wardrobe and costuming, makeup, music, set designs, laboratory, production — stars, extras, directors, producers, public relations, advertising, distribution, legal departments, executive, administrative, and purchasing department busily engaged in buying stories, talent, materials and supplies that run into staggering amounts.

A shooting schedule is laid out for each picture, and the construction department arranges its work according to those schedules. A certain number of working days is allowed for each set, but Van Dyke's favorite stunt was to shoot ahead of schedule and then start hollering because J. J. Cohn didn't have his next set ready for him. Mannix always knew when Van Dyke was shooting a picture because he was apt to get the same call from Cedric Gibbons, set designer; Herbert Stothart, musical director; Douglas Shearer, in charge of recording; or any other department head for that matter. Woody didn't like anyone telling him what to do or what not to do with the set, and that went for the front office, too. The set was his ship and he ran it. Anyone could tell him that the rushes of the previous day were bad and he wouldn't object — in fact, he welcomed constructive criticism, if it could be proven it was constructive, but no interference with the way he worked on stage. He was the same about his crew. He wouldn't tolerate any interference from anyone with the way his gang worked out their jobs. His only concern was that his crew produce what he asked for when he asked for it, but let them fail to come through and he would raise nine thousand kinds of hell. Van wasn't callous or indifferent to people. He just didn't care to spend time in controversy that could be better and more profitably employed at work. Making movies was a business to Van Dyke and he didn't like to waste the company's time or money, his own, or the rest of the cast's.

Mr. Mannix' inter-com buzzer rang and his secretary informed him that Mr. Van Dyke was in the outer office. "Send him right in!" The two men greeted each other and Mannix asked Van when he thought he'd be finished with "Hideout," his current picture with Robert Montgomery and Maureen O'Sullivan. Woody said he should have it completed around the twentieth of October. Mannix wasn't concerned with Cohn's phone call for he knew Woody and J. J. would straighten out that problem themselves.

Joe Cohn and Van Dyke, while outwardly appearing to be at each other's throats, had been close associates on the lot since the Tim McCoy days. Cohn had learned then about Van Dyke. Woody delighted in finishing work at about 1:30 or 2:00 P.M. and then go by J. J. Cohn's office and tell him he was through shooting for the day. Cohn checked with the department heads to find out if their assignments had been completed. They were. He then checked with the lab if the shooting schedule as planned had been executed. It had. Thinking that Van Dyke was sloughing off his work to get scenes on film so fast, J. J. looked at the scenes Van had made. They were excellent. Upon inquiring from Woody why he didn't shoot more he was blandly told . . . "I just shoot what you set up on your schedule!" Not able to get from Van Dyke how much work he could do in a day, Cohn solved the problem in another way. He put a unit manager on with Van Dyke. The fellow was an old stage actor who practically couldn't get a job anywhere else . . . a real old timer in the business. Joe Cohn had observed this to be Van's weak spot — he was always giving them work and would go out of his way many times to help them. Woody knew the old timer, as unit manager, would be held responsible if he was left without anything to do . . . so he kept his days full and turned out pictures in record time.

Mannix had not called Van Dyke to his office because of Cohn's phone call. He had another problem on his mind. "Van, I want you to do the next Crawford picture." Woody asked why. Mannix told him that he felt Crawford was getting a bit typed and the change would be good for her. Van said, "Well, you know I won't tolerate any temperament from anybody." Mr. Mannix assured him that he had talked it all over with Joan and she had agreed to have Van direct her. Van consented and as he left asked that a script be sent to his office as soon as possible.

Eddie and Van had worked out similar problems before. Eddie knew he had the slickest way of getting around a problem without a fuss. One time a certain beautiful star showed up on the set with bangs. It so happened that neither the studio, General Manager, nor the director liked bangs on any girl. Van Dyke winked at Mannix. Mr. Mannix nodded his approval. No, the director didn't go to the star and tell her that she looked terrible. That would have hurt her feelings and created a scene. Instead of saying anything at all, he simply instructed his cameraman to cut over her shoulder, thereby eliminating her face. On closeups he had the camera shoot the back of her head, catching only the male star's face. This was a simple process and eliminated the bangs. Of course, it eliminated the star's face, too, in all of the scenes. Not a word had been spoken by anyone, but the next day the young lady reported to the stage without bangs and was quickly restored to her rightful place in each shot from then on. Woody often worked things out in the same casual and deliberate way — even to going home and not answering the telephone for Eddie Mannix a couple of times. Nothing disturbed Van if he felt he was right. Despite the fact that he kept most people on their toes all the time, everybody on the lot had the greatest of respect for him because he worked harder than anyone else on every picture. He hadn't changed a bit from the way he worked in the old silent days at the Burston Studio. He was always on the set every morning at seven-thirty and had the entire layout checked before anyone else arrived. He knew exactly what he was going to do each day before the cast or crew reported on the stage.

Clark Gable was to star with Joan Crawford in "Forsaking All Others" and he was in Mr. Mannix' office talking over the deal. The discussion switched to Van and Gable said, "Van Dyke's certainly an unusual director." Mannix shot back an affirmative, "You bet he is! In fact," he said, "he's not only unusual — I don't think there's another director like him!" He told Gable how he had seen Van take a script, look at it for a couple of days, call construction and ask what sets were ready, check props and casting and the next day start shooting and do the first and last scenes of the story on that first day. This, Mannix pointed out, required great concentration, but Woody never once lost his sequence and always knew exactly what he had on film on every picture all of the time. Gable said, "He often shot so fast on 'Manhattan Melodrama' the script girl would lose track and when he saw her asking some member of the crew, Van would inform her exactly the numbers of the takes she had missed." Eddie agreed, "That's right — there's nothing chi-chi about him when it comes to movies. He just walks right in there and does 'em!"

Mr. Mannix chuckled as he got up from his desk to get a glass of water and said, "Darn — how that fellow sticks to his own ideas!" He told his number one male star how, in the early days when Van's Tim McCoy pictures started to make a lot of money, the studio wanted to give him a raise. Van Dyke was then getting six hundred a week and had a contract that still had three years to go. Mannix said he told Van he was going to give him fifteen hundred a week because of the fine job he was doing. This was a raise of nine hundred a week, but Woody said he was worth two thousand. Eddie said he told him he couldn't pay two thousand. Van Dyke then said to keep it at six hundred. Thinking Van Dyke might be upset, the studio gave him a bonus of twenty thousand dollars. Woody distributed the entire amount equally among the members of his crew, not keeping one penny for himself. He went to Eddie Mannix and told him he didn't want any bonuses . . . he wanted his salary at two thousand, or leave it where it was! They left it where it was for the remaining three years and then he got his raise. Gable inquired if he was mad about the deal and Mannix said, "That's the amazing part about that guy. He never changed his attitude toward me or the studio and it didn't affect his work in the least. He just felt he was worth two thousand and that was that. Not many people I know would spend one hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars just to stay with what he believed was right — but that's the way Van is built."

The executive told Gable they would probably start the Crawford picture around the twenty-third or twenty-fourth of September and that in any event they would give him plenty of notice. The two men left the office together, Gable on his way home and Mr. Mannix to make his usual round of the stages. Van Dyke never objected to Eddie Mannix visiting his sets because he knew there wouldn't be any interference from him. But even Mr. Mannix was never quite sure that he was safe on a Van Dyke stage. This trip proved to be one of those days. The minute he opened the stage door, Pop Arnold, Van's trustworthy and husky grip, grabbed Mr. Mannix by the back of the neck and with the aid of a couple of other crewmen, had him in the air over their heads and on their way to a big pool in the middle of the stage. Van Dyke, delighted, was leading the whole procession. The only thing that saved Mannix from a good ducking was that he took the prank in stride. Woody loved to see what reaction he would get from people caught in such a spot. Mannix' Irish smile and the fact that he had offered no objection saved the studio exec, and both he and Van drove away together discussing the Crawford picture, which was to be Woody's next.

It was during the shooting of "Forsaking All Others" that Eddie Mannix and a young lady visited the Van Dyke set. The minute they came on stage Van inquired who the beautiful young girl was. He was surprised when Mr. Mannix introduced her as his niece, Ruth Mannix. Not long thereafter, Mr. Mannix was equally surprised when Van Dyke called him "Uncle Eddie" and introduced his niece back to him as Mrs. W. S. Van Dyke II.

Chapter 29

NELSON EDDY, JEANETTE MacDONALD AND VAN DYKE

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

Nelson Eddy, Jeanette MacDonald and Van Dyke

A prominent artist on the Los Angeles Philharmonic series had canceled his engagement at the last minute because of sudden illness. Mr. L. E. Behymer, manager of the Southern California Concerts, wired New York for a replacement. New York recommended a young baritone by the name of Nelson Eddy, of stellar qualifications, who was making his West Coast debut in San Diego. A wire was sent to New York that Los Angeles had never heard of him. New York wired back their assurance that Los Angeles would make no mistake in accepting him and, furthermore, there was no other substitute available. Eddy was notified and quickly switched his bookings. Los Angeles, though skeptical, turned out en masse. The blond young baritone's performance was much more casual and informal than the usual concert artist's, and he took Los Angeles by storm. He was called back for encore after encore. In the audience was a man whose job is an important one in the movie business but is seldom given credit. He was a talent scout from RKO studio. He was deeply impressed and talked Eddy into a screen test. In fact, he did such a good job of talking, Nelson wound up with three screen tests — one for RKO, one for M-G-M, and one for Paramount.

Mark Sandrich, live wire and capable director at RKO, recognized the possibilities of this good looking young fellow and recommended a contract. At the time, the studios were cutting stars' salaries in half, so they thought that Nelson Eddy, being a newcomer, would be glad to start out for half salary. The baritone was summoned and a deal proposed, but Eddy said "No." He had already canceled several concerts but then wired them he would be available. The next day he was given a contract with full salary for one picture and again had to postpone his concerts. In this picture, Eddy had only a bit that captured neither his personality nor the fancy of the public. Disgusted with Hollywood, he gave up the idea and returned East to follow his career on the concert stage.

Nelson Eddy had been born and reared in the atmosphere and environment of a modest New England home and had from childhood loved to sing. His first concert had been when he was eighteen and he had soon become one of the most popular baritones in his locale. He had then taken up the study of opera seriously and, after a season with the Philadelphia Civic Opera Company, had skyrocketed to fame in the East on the concert stage.

Ida Koverman, executive assistant to Louis B. Mayer and a fine musician in her own right, had been enthusiastic about Eddy's first Los Angeles concert. She kept track of him and was thoroughly sold on his ability and screen potentialities. She went to Mr. Mayer and they talked it over. People didn't stand in line, she said, for hours to pay one dollar and three dollars and a half per ticket to hear this fellow sing unless they liked him. And, what's more, it proved there were thousands of people whose appreciation of good music did pay big dividends at the box office. Nelson Eddy again headed West to take another whirl at the movies, this time at M-G-M. But again he was grossly disappointed.

The movie business was comprised of two factions — one, the economic, and the other, the cultural. The pendulum seemed to swing to the economic side first. The movies had tried and proved the success of dramatics, comedy, mystery, melodrama, farce, historical film, biographies, and musicals of the Broadway revue type, but musical operetta of the kind that attracted concert audiences, and which could utilize the vocal talents of a star like Nelson Eddy, had not yet found its niche of popularity with the masses. And the mass choice governs the kind of movies most producers make.

To many in the movie business, the concert stage didn't exist. For one man to walk out on a stage before several thousand people with only a piano to accompany him, and hold them for over two hours was unheard of by many movie producers. No band? No scenery? No act? Just singing? They didn't understand musical appreciation to that degree. Thus the conflict between the economic and the cultural went on.

But Nelson Eddy was under contract, to M-G-M, which, with options, covered a period of seven years. Story conference after story conference. Ideas, ideas, ideas—but nothing came of them. Test after test, until the young baritone would have gladly given back the piece of paper he had signed. Singing on the concert stage and in opera was one thing, but acting as the movies required was quite another. He felt foolish, awkward and extremely helpless before the cameras. He missed the warm faces of the audience. There was no applause to inspire him — just drab, cold sound stages and a battery of lights. Technicians, sound men, mixers, girls writting things on paper, directors, producers, assistants, carpenters, electricians, grips, property men — people so accustomed to their work they unknowingly acted indifferent to what went on around them. The young concert artist felt as much out of place as would the greatest cinema star, had the tables been reversed. What would a movie star do, he thought, if asked to give a concert at the Philharmonic? If told to vocalize and not dramatize, he would feel as helpless as Nelson Eddy did when he was told to act and not sing. And, furthermore, the stage acting Eddy had been taught in grand opera was of the Delsarte system of dramatic art that hadn't changed in seventy-five years. Basically, it consisted of three gestures: Raise the right arm as you turn and look to the right; the left arm as you gaze to the left; or both arms either up or down, as the mood might be. And even to do this in opera, one had to sing.

For eighteen months, director after director and producer after producer by-passed accepting the responsibility of Eddy. He did one picture during that time and in that one they had placed him on a pedestal in the middle of a one hundred piece symphony orchestra and let him sing. That he did nobly, but a couple of songs in the middle of a symphony orchestra in eighteen months didn't warrant a salary like that called for in Nelson Eddy's contract.

Wherever large sums of money are spent, there the cold-blooded experts come in. Nelson Eddy was in a bad way and he knew it. Gossip goes with the movie business. Rumors, rumors, rumors. It looked as though Nelson Eddy was on his way out. But L. B. Mayer and his executive secretary, Ida Koverman, persisted. A meeting of the executive staff was held and considerable deliberation was given to the problem. A solution was reached. Hunt Stromberg and other members of the production staff were summoned.

Jeanette MacDonald was under contract at M-G-M and Mr. Mayer told them he wanted to team up Eddy and Mac-

Donald and feature them in "Naughty Marietta." Arguments ensued. One said, "The featured song of that operetta, 'Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life,' is the theme song at Forest Lawn Memorial Park in Glendale, California." "The public won't buy that kind of entertainment," said others. But L. B. was way ahead of them. Ever since "The Cuban Love Song," starring Tibbett, he had wanted to present a new kind of musical film for the masses who could pay only fifty cents at the box office. Mr. Mayer stood his ground and Hunt Stromberg agreed to produce. But then they ran into the problem of getting this glorious idea on film. L. B. Mayer said, "Get me Van Dyke."

At first, Woody thought the idea was as cockeyed as when L. B. asked him to take two hundred and twenty-seven people and ninety tons of equipment through Africa to shoot "Trader Horn." However, on second thought — probably after hearing somebody say he wasn't the man to do it — he changed his mind and the deal was on.

Mr. Van Dyke needed no briefing on the spot Nelson Eddy was in. He was well aware of that, as was everyone else on the M-G-M lot.

Eddy, knowing this would probably be his last chance, sent an eighty-word wire to his little friend and vocal coach of grand opera days, telling him of the spot he was in and asking him if he would come West and help him on the assignment. Dr. Edouard Lippé, who was enjoying a fishing trip in Norfolk, Virginia, sent a two-word return wire, "Hell, yes!"

Van Dyke didn't want to discuss the role with Eddy because he felt the less Eddy thought about acting the better off he would be. He wanted to wait until they met on the set and tie into the action spontaneously.

Dr. Edouard Lippé, Nelson Eddy's vocal coach, arrived in Hollywood. Upon meeting Van Dyke he was told to get Eddy to unbend — to forget himself. Van Dyke recognized in Lippé a perfect type for the lackey in the inn scene in the picture — he was genial, happy and energetic — and the first thing Lippé knew he found himself in the movies, too.

The stage was set for the first day's shooting. Jeanette MacDonald was in her portable dressing room. Nelson Eddy and Dr. Lippé were on the set. Van decided to break the ice with the lesser of his two opera stars and shoot the scene of Dr. Lippé climbing the lamp post to light the light. There was a quick briefing of business and action and "Naughty Marietta" was under way. The whistle blew. "Quiet! Roll 'em!" Lippé didn't move. He was waiting for the curtain to rise or for some definite cue for action. Woody said, "I've had 'em green, but never this green before!"

Nelson Eddy was across the stage rehearsing his lines, pacing up and down like a caged lion. If he could only run out that stage door and never come back, he thought. Before he had time to act on that impulse, the dreaded moment arrived. Van Dyke called for him. Nelson cleared his throat, "Yes, sir," and walked over to the camera. Van said, "Do you know your lines, kid?" Eddy replied he did and Woody smiled and quickly said, "Places, everybody — let's go!" There was a click as a man snapped two boards together under the mike boom and a voice from somewhere said "Speak!" This was it. Nelson Eddy was actually making a take in his first starring role. He stepped onto the set, opened his mouth to speak, but nothing came out. His mind was a blank and he blew the scene sky high. Woody smiled and said, "That's okay, kid, suppose you run over the lines yourself for a bit and I'll make another shot." Eddy, embarrassed, went back to his corner and had a forty-minute communion with himself.

Jeanette MacDonald came out of her dressing room and said, "Mr. Van, I'm in trouble." Woody said, "What's the trouble, honey?" "The producer told me I must wear this," she said as she showed him a small hat which she held in her left hand. "You know it's not my type." Van said, "Well, it is kind of small." "Wardrobe designed this one," she said as she flashed a big blue hat trimmed with ostrich feathers from behind her back. "I want to wear this." Woody chuckled but wasn't given a chance to say a word. "It's not temperament to know what's becoming to you, is it, Mr. Van? Especially when you're being photographed?" "No, it's not, honey," Van said, "Pity the star who doesn't know that." Jeanette continued animatedly, "This is the opening shot in the picture and you know that first impression is a most important one — isn't it, Mr. Van Dyke?" Try and resist. Woody said, "What do you want me to do about it?" "I'll try them both on for you, and *you* tell me which one I'm going to wear." He consented. She didn't demonstrate any animation when she put on the little hat, but she was all radiance and sunshine when she tried on the big one with the blue ostrich feathers. Van Dyke said, "Fat chance I've got of telling you which one you're going to wear. Wear the big one!" Wearing the big hat and beaming over her victory, Jeanette strutted back to her dressing room.

Noticing that Eddy was still pacing back and forth across the stage, Van called Dr. Lippé to shoot the close-up shot on the balcony of the inn. The take called for a startled look or expression of utter surprise. Van explained what he wanted and asked the little opera star if he could register surprise. Lippé assured Van he could and when Woody asked for it, he really got it — one of those super over-melodramatic expressions of shock that only an opera performer could give — eyes as big as saucers, mouth wide open, Delsarte gestures and all. Van Dyke was startled himself, yelled "Cut." Dr. Lippé had cramped Woody's "one-take" style. The director told Lippé that what he wanted was a startled look, an expression of natural surprise. He told the Doctor to relax and said, "I'll show you how it's done in the movies." Van knew the Doctor was a bit jumpy and had given Harry Albiez a hint. They got ready for another try and just as Van gave Lippé the cue, Albiez reached up from below with a long broomstick and tapped him on the back. With a startled cry, the Doctor jumped and gave Van Dyke a perfect expression of surprise. Woody said casually, "That's how it's done in the movies, Doctor. Easy, isn't it?"

Nelson Eddy felt somewhat eased by the humor of this crazy gang. Van Dyke called for him and said, "Okay, kid, let's go." Eddy walked briskly across the stage, determined to make the shot good. He smiled as Jeanette took him by the arm. The cameras started to turn, the stars stepped onto the set, and, SOCKO! . . . the poor kid walked right into a prop tree, knocking his hat sideways and down over his eyes. He stopped, squared the hat around, but went through with the scene. When Van called "Cut!" Nelson started to apologize, thinking the scene would have to be done over. But Woody said, "It was okay, kid. A nice shot. That tree stunt took your mind off yourself and it made a very natural scene."

Thus far things had gone well, but in filming any costume picture, many problems arise. For different scenes in "Naughty Marietta" Jeanette MacDonald had to spend much time with her hairdressers in preparing the proper coiffure. Frequently she would have to sit in her dressing room long periods of time while waiting for her hairdo to dry. Van Dyke then had to shoot other scenes. On one such occasion, Jeanette had been patiently sitting it out in her dressing room when her wardrobe mistress said some rushes of the previous day's shooting were being shown in a projection room close by. (A "rush" is a studio phrase used for the film or "takes" made on the previous day. The negative is "rushed" to the lab and developed immediately so that the staff and cast may look at the shots before starting another day's work.) The wardrobe mistress suggested that she go to the projection room and look at the rushes to break the boredom of waiting; that, after all, her hair would dry in the projection room just as quickly. This was indeed a fine idea, so "Naughty Marietta" left word that if Van Dyke wanted her she could be found in Projection Room "A." She hadn't been gone five minutes when Van Dyke finished his takes and called for MacDonald. The person with whom Jeanette had left her message had also left the set for a few minutes. Van was impatient as he wanted to keep his schedule. He soon found that he had lost his assistant, who was trying to find his star. One of those people who always know everything piped up and told the now irked director that his star was in Projection Room "A" looking at a picture. Van Dyke said, "Well, that's just dandy. I'm holding up an entire company while my leading lady is enjoying a movie." If MacDonald thought he was going to sit down and wait for her to finish her movie she had another guess coming. He yelled, "That's all for today — company dismissed!" — sent everybody home and went home himself.

Shortly thereafter, the singing star returned to the sound stage where her company had been shooting, but something was wrong. All of the lights were out with the exception of the night work lamp usually placed in the center of the big stages at the conclusion of a day's shooting, and the place was as deserted as a graveyard. The exteriors of all the buildings look alike, so Miss MacDonald inquired of the watchman whether she was on the right stage. The watchman told her that Van Dyke had been unable to find her when he was ready to shoot and so had dismissed the company and gone home. "No!" she cried. She couldn't believe what she had heard. What kind of a man was this to do such a thing? If she had remained in her dressing room she still would have been unable to work until her hair was dry. She immediately went to the front office to see Eddie Mannix and tell him of her trouble. He didn't have to be told for the story had gone all over the lot in seconds. He told her Van was that way. Anybody who worked on a picture with him worked when Van Dyke was ready to work, or not at all. Jeanette explained what actually had taken place and Mr. Mannix assured her that he would do everything in his power to straighten out the problem. Van Dyke couldn't be reached by telephone. The only information available was Woody's shooting schedule for the next day. It called for MacDonald at nine o'clock so all Mr. Mannix could do was to tell her to be there the next morning at nine sharp.

Jeanette went home, now extremely perturbed. She had made four important pictures, among which was one with Ernst Lubitsch and one with Rouben Mamoulian, in addition to four other pictures of somewhat less importance. She didn't want anyone to think she was responsible for such a foolish affair and, above all, didn't want to give the impression that she had gone "prima donna." Then "Naughty Marietta" got an idea. She telephoned the studio and got hold of Harry Albiez in the property department and asked him if he would keep a secret. The always obliging middle man of more pranks than a porcupine has quills found himself again involved. The next day the stage was crowded, as rumor had it Van Dyke was really going to tell off his leading lady. He had finished his previous take at 8:55 sharp and was pacing back and forth in the center of the stage with the short, quick steps that were typical of him when he had a burn on. He was rehearsing the speech he had prepared for his "prima donna" when somebody opened the big swinging doors. Six husky stagehands entered, carrying a large dog house. By now, Van Dyke was mad. What ass could be so stupid as to bring a dog house onto the "Naughty Marietta" set? They crossed the stage and set it practically at his feet. Van was about to tarnish the atmosphere when a slender white arm shot out of the door of the dog house and shoved a shiny red apple into his face. Woody grabbed the apple, and before he could say a word another arm shot out with a second shiny red apple. He grabbed that, too, and then a face with the sweetest smile popped out of the "dog house" and, with a twinkle in her eyes, "Naughty Marietta" said, "And now may I come out, please, hummm, Mr. Boss Man, may I please, hummmm?" Van broke into a roar of laughter as he grabbed her in his arms. MacDonald had really topped the tough guy. Van told her, however, that he would never forgive her for crabbing his act as he had been rehearsing his speech all night. Jeanette told him she'd been rehearsing all night, too — walking the floor after telling Harry what to do — wondering if Van Dyke would see it just as she hoped he would. But she had come to the conclusion, she said, that she couldn't be any worse off, so she went through with the deal. Harry did himself proud. Jeanette then explained to Van Dyke what had happened the day before and all was forgiven.

Things settled down and again went along well for a few days but Van Dyke couldn't seem to break Nelson Eddy's stiffness. They had been on the picture three weeks and Van Dyke was trying to get a certain shot with Eddy, without success. He became a trifle impatient and one day blurted out, "I've handled Indians, African natives, South Sea Islanders, rhinos, pygmies and Eskimos and made them act — but not

Nelson Eddy!" Nelson heard him say it. That crack, added to what he had already gone through on the lot, was too much. He had had great confidence in Van Dyke, but now was ready to give up the whole thing.

Van Dyke was not one to let a condition like this continue. He never played for a laugh at the expense of another but it was typical of him to make light of a tough spot by some such asinine remark. He actually had not intended the outburst to be taken seriously.

Woody recognized that a critical situation existed and that it was time for action. He called for a recording session.

When musicals first started in sound pictures, the singing and action were recorded and photographed simultaneously, but it was difficult to get both good photography and good recording at the same time. The method improved as time went on and the vocal work was pre-recorded before the actual photographing of the scene. In recording, the star worked only with the orchestra in a large stage. There were no cameras or lights — only a sound boom and microphones. Then the stars moved to the set to photograph the actual scene. As the scene was being shot a recording of the prescored song was played over a loud speaker and the stars sang along with the recording while being photographed, so that the lip movement would synchronize with the sound on the screen.

Van recognized the spot he was in and, knowing that he would never break Eddy's stiffness in shooting, had changed his tactics and switched to recording. He felt Eddy would be more in his own element with just an orchestra — no lights, cameras, people or fuss — and that if he let him sing he could get him down to earth again. Van selected a number with a big finish that would give his baritone a chance to cut loose. Nelson had been accustomed to singing with full, free tones in concert and opera so Woody said, "Let it out, kid — give it all you've got!" They ran through the number once, but Nelson botched the climax. He was still tense and couldn't relax. Whether those present were even thinking it or not, Nelson imagined they were saying, "Why doesn't that guy give up?" Van Dyke paid no attention to the muff but patiently and quietly said, "Let's do it over." They started again — but at the climax, no high tone. It seemed like a hopeless job. Woody called a halt, put his arm around Eddy's shoulder and explained that he was going to intercut the sound track for close-ups, so to continue singing even though he did miss a note now and then. Van explained that the bad spots could be cut out for close-ups, and the balance of the sound track used. The suggestion eased Eddy considerably so he tried again, and he made up his mind that this time, cutting or no cutting, he was going to do the song perfectly. He started singing with everything he had. Dr. Lippé was giving him all the encouragement he could from behind Van Dyke. The recording was going swell. The orchestra surged into the climax and Nelson Eddy's chest swelled with a deep breath as he really hit that final high note. But his ears nearly burst as his voice and the music were drowned out by the sound of a steamship whistle — not a Staten Island ferryboat whistle, but a deafening blast that fairly shook the building. It sounded as if the Queen Mary had pulled into the stage. Nelson Eddy was so startled he just stood there, limp. Then he realized what had happened and began to laugh. Van Dyke, roaring with laughter himself, put his arm about Nelson's shoulder and with tears in his eyes said, "No one ever registered a better expression, kid! Nelson, you're a great actor!"

From that moment on, the jinx was gone. In an instant a close bond was welded between these two men for Eddy knew by now that Woody only pulled his gags on people he considered his friends.

Van knew that Eddy's stiffness was gone and told him that if he'd take care of the singing, he would worry about what got on the screen. He had no more trouble with Eddy in bringing out his best facets. Dr. Lippé remarked that, in all of his experience as a vocal coach and opera singer, he had never seen anyone who could play with people's emotions, abilities and inabilities as Van Dyke could. He worked with them as a champion player moves his chess men.

When Jeanette MacDonald heard about Nelson Eddy's experience on the recording stage, she was greatly amused and made up her mind that Van Dyke wouldn't pull anything like that on her. But Woody had other plans. He called everyone on stage to photograph a scene for which she had already recorded her voice. This was Jeanette's first experience in photographing a pre-recorded song. They were on a big stage and the scene was the one in which she sang "The Italian Street Song." The cast were all in place, ready for action. The procedure was to be just the reverse of that on the recording stage. In this case there was no sound recorded — the picture was to be shot as a silent film. The pre-scored record was to be played over loud speakers and the cast was to synchronize its action with the music.

Van had played the recording twice to be sure Jeanette had the feel of the situation and asked her if she was ready for the take. She replied "Yes," although she was quite nervous because it seemed awkward to have to sing along with her own voice and act at the same time. Van Dyke called "Quiet, please!" — a whistle sounded and Woody said, "Turn 'em!" Jeanette had cleared her throat and opened her mouth to pick up her own voice on the first notes of "The Italian

Street Song" when a conglomeration of Chinese music blatted out of the speakers. Miss MacDonald stood there with her mouth still open, not knowing what to do. Then when she saw Van Dyke laughing, she knew he had evened the score on the dog house gag.

The picture, "Naughty Marietta" was finished without further delay. Van was profound in his praise of Herbert Stothart's hard work and great contribution in working out and arranging the musical score, and of Doug Shearer and Bill Steinkemp's excellent recording job.

Nelson Eddy said of Van Dyke: "That man's honesty is a rare virtue. The thing that impressed me the most from the time I first met him was his absolute frankness."

Jeanette MacDonald said, "I found Van Dyke so enigmatical and yet compatible, and then again absolutely pious at times — but always with the most delightful sense of humor!"

Chapter 30

WASHINGTON
VS.
HOLLYWOOD

CHAPTER THIRTY

Washington vs. Hollywood

Hollywood and official Washington, D.C. had not hit it off too well. Many on Capitol Hill looked upon the movies for the most part as a lot of gingerbread, and Hollywood regarded Congress as a big show. One person knew, probably more than all others, that both were wrong. Because of her close contact with official Washington and Hollywood, Mabel Walker Willebrandt, former Assistant Attorney General of the United States, was desirous to see the relations of these two important groups more harmonious.

Mrs. Willebrandt had spent many years on Capitol Hill, and having tried more cases before the Supreme Court of the United States than any other attorney living, she well knew the multitudinous problems facing Congress were far from being a show. And, as an attorney in her private practice, she had represented many of the motion picture industry's most outstanding personages and knew there was much more to this mythical city than appeared on the surface.

Mabel Willebrandt had met Van Dyke some time before. She had marveled at his integrity and outstanding ability. When she saw a private showing of "Naughty Marietta" at the studio, just after its completion, she suggested to Mr.

Mayer that he have the world premiere in Washington. She assured him if he did, she would aid in the selection of the official Washington guest list. This idea, she felt, would be an excellent means of letting each group meet the other, on common ground.

Three hundred and fifty members of official Washington received the following invitation:

W. S. VAN DYKE II
Extends a cordial invitation to
. . . .
to attend a private showing of the
Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer screen classic,
"Naughty Marietta"
Starring
Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy
Friday, March Eight, at Midnight
Loew's Fox Theatre
Admission by Card Only Formal

Among the guests were the Honorable and Mrs. Harlowe Fiske Stone, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court; the Honorable and Mrs. Robert H. Jackson, Justice of the Supreme Court (who presided at the Nuernberg Trial of Nazi War Criminals); Dr. and Mrs. Ross McIntyre, President Roosevelt's private physician; Mr. and Mrs. Wilson D. Compton of Boston Tech (now of atom bomb fame); Senator and Mrs. Hugo Black (now Justice of the Supreme Court); Honorable and Mrs. Stanley Reid (now Justice of the Supreme Court); Honorable and Mrs. Eugene Meyer, owner of the Washington Post; Senator and Mrs. Robert M. LaFollette; Honorable Charles Curtis, former Vice-President of the United States, and his brother and his sister — the famous Dolly Gann; Senator and Mrs. William E. Borah; Secretary and Mrs. Harold L. Ickes; Senator William Gibbs McAdoo;

Senator and Mrs. Hiram Johnson; Honorable and Mrs. Gene Vidal (pioneer of aviation); Senator and Mrs. Walter F. George; Norman McIntyre and Laurie Howe, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's secretaries. There were over thirty-five senators and members of Congress in addition to many other important personages.

There were also present His Excellency, the Ambassador of The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and Madame Troyanovsky (now the great Russian General); and the former Minister of Venezuela and Senora Dona de Arcaya (now President of Venezuela). Present also were all the ambassadors and their ladies in Washington at the time — among them the Minister of Austria and Madame Prochnich; the Minister of Greece and Madame Simopoulas, and Hans Luther, German Ambassador to the United States.

A formal dinner preceded the premiere and Van Dyke was asked to speak. Woody opened his remarks with: "Debunking my town may be a great indoor sport, but there's more genuine romance in a day's work in that mythical city of films than there is in the South Seas, the African Jungles and the Frozen North combined. Where's the romance?" he continued, "Why, in the people. They flock there from all parts of the globe. Writers from Czechoslovakia, actors from England, directors from Poland and technicians from various lands all over the world. You would think," he pointed out, "that this would give Hollywood a cosmopolitan air, but there isn't anything cosmopolitan about the town at all — it's as rural as any four corners in Indiana. In fact," he said, "farmers and actors are about the only people who consistently get up before sunrise to go to work. The actor is donning makeup and the farmer milking his cows before the first jangle of the city fellow's alarm clock. I'm sorry if I disappoint you. Hollywood is not synthetic. I've been there twenty years between location jaunts and I've found more color, internationalism, and genuine enthusiasm there than any place else in the world."

They liked his candor. When before an audience, Van Dyke had great dignity and poise. He was a forceful, dramatic and intelligent speaker. He now switched his remarks to a more serious vein and said he hoped his audiences would not object to his expressing his own views about the importance of films in international affairs. "There are those who do not consider the movie an essential industry," he said, "and yet, the movie is a form of pictorial journalism that reaches millions of people each week! Can any leader in public life afford to overlook that?" He went on to say that many producers, writers and directors in Hollywood advocated authenticity in films and he cited, as examples, several of his own pictures, pointing out that he meant not only authenticity in locale, but also realism in treatment. "If handled intelligently and without racial prejudice, the movie can be a potent force for good as an instrument in international affairs and, by the same reasoning, can be a destructive agency if not given the proper support." Van Dyke was emphasizing the importance of the screen as a universal common denominator. "Whether people speak Russian, German, French or English, their human experiences are all basically the same, and therefore, if properly handled, the movie can aid in bringing about a more universal understanding. People understand what they see."

The entire group went direct from the dinner to the premiere at Loew's Fox Theatre. No Hollywood showing ever brought a more enthusiastic response than official Washington gave "Naughty Marietta." Mabel Walker Willebrandt had hoped that a combination such as Jeanette MacDonald, Nelson Eddy, "Naughty Marietta," Victor Herbert's music, a world premiere and Van Dyke might impress official Washington. It most certainly had! There had been something genuine about the whole affair from start to finish that made a lasting impression on the distinguished guests who were present. Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy's beautiful rendition of the Victor Herbert music and the nature of the entertainment seemed to mirror in true perspective this mythical city that Washington had known too little about.

Mrs. Willebrandt had invited a party of much smaller proportions to her Georgetown home for a midnight snack following the show. Van Dyke left early with the hostess to help get things ready for the guests. Upon arrival at the Georgetown residence, both host and hostess proceeded to the kitchen. Van had convinced the former Assistant Attorney General that he was a cook from way back and wanted to scramble the eggs. Mrs. Willebrandt's housekeeper had several skillets ready and Woody, priding himself on his domesticity, grabbed two skillets and said, "See? Both hands!" With a frying pan in each hand he started to show his hostess how they flopped eggs over in Africa, but the handle came off one skillet and he let go of the other trying to catch the broken one as it flew through the air. The Russian Ambassador and Madame Troyanovsky came in just in time to see Mabel Walker Willebrandt and Van Dyke busily engaged in cleaning the scrambled eggs up off the kitchen floor. Soon after the arrival of all the guests Woody was in his niche. A genius when it came to entertaining, he soon had different crews organized to take over the skillets.

Small groups then gathered about in different parts of the spacious home to discuss the premiere and the movies in general. Nelson Eddy organized a quartet in the music room. Woody made the rounds from one group to another. Supreme Court Judges and Senators asked questions about the mechanics of the movies and Woody's answers were as prompt, concise and to the point as was his shooting. He asked them questions, too. What laws were being enacted? How would they affect people at large? Did Congress as a body view important questions with an impartial and non-partisan attitude, or not? He talked with Republicans and Democrats alike. Told them he was a registered Democrat but didn't agree with all their views. And he said the same about the Republicans.

Nelson Eddy's singing group was in the reception hall. To get everybody in a festive mood, Woody gathered several more guests and turned the quartet into a glee club that would have given the Pennsylvanians some competition. They made a round robin picture under the huge chandelier in the reception hall.

Woody tapped the baton on the banister for attention. Nelson Eddy announced the closing number of their "concert" and everybody joined in singing "Auld Lang Syne." The party was over . . . the whole affair a great success. It was four A.M. Owl street cars had departed and the official government automobiles had been sent back to Washington earlier. A foreign ambassador remarked, "You Americans have a genius for solving problems. How would you get around one like this?" Van Dyke and Nelson Eddy accepted the challenge and went outside to hail a taxi, but the streets of Georgetown were deserted. A milk wagon came into view. "Hey, there!" called Van as he ran up the street. He paid the driver for the use of his wagon. The guests had gathered on the veranda and were surprised to see Woody and Nelson Eddy, with reins in hand, drive the wagon up to the door. "We could do it this way in the movies," he said. Nelson Eddy hopped off and assisted the Ambassador and other members of the party aboard. "Giddy-ap!" yelled Van Dyke — and thus came to close another day the American Way.

Chapter 31

"NAUGHTY MARIETTA" TO "ROSE MARIE"

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

"Naughty Marietta" to "Rose Marie"

Few at the studio had believed "Naughty Marietta" would strike such a popular chord. It was inevitable that the combination of Jeanette McDonald and Nelson Eddy would have to be repeated, as had been the case with Myrna Loy and William Powell after "The Thin Man." The front office had picked a right combination this time, and the music of light opera was definitely wedded to the screen, as was proved by the requests that deluged the studio for more films like "Naughty Marietta." In a few months Van Dyke, MacDonald and Eddy were on their way to Lake Tahoe in Northern California to film "Rose Marie."

It required a special train of seventeen box cars to ship the necessary supplies and equipment to the location in the High Sierras. Several totem poles forty feet high were erected at a state-owned point at Emerald Bay for the Indian totem pole dance number.

The company spent a lot of time at Lake Tahoe. Chuck wagons followed the unit and served meals. There were over seven hundred Indians and a couple of hundred whites in the cast and crew so the problem of food was not an easy one. The only practical solution at noon, due to limited time, was a box lunch. One day the prop department fixed up a special small table for Woody outside his tent. They promoted a beautiful salad and some hot beef stew. It was a delicious looking meal. The director sat down at the table and said, "Sure looks swell." Then he looked around. "Is this the same thing everybody else is getting for lunch?" He was told it was not — that this had been fixed especially for him. He stood up, thanked them for their thoughtfulness and said, "I'm sorry, boys, I thought you knew there would be no discrimination in this unit." He went to the end of the line where he waited his turn to get the same box lunch as the rest of the company.

That afternoon Woody ran into a little trouble with Nelson Eddy but it was not his acting this time. The scene they were working on called for Sergeant Bruck of the Mounties (Nelson Eddy) to mount his horse quickly and take off on a chase. "Sergeant" Eddy was apparently not moving as fast as Van Dyke wanted him to. Woody, an excellent horseman himself, showed Eddy how to get on the horse and take off lickety-split. After the demonstration, they got all ready to shoot the scene and Van said, "Now remember, kid, make it look spry. Get into that saddle with plenty of spring." Northwest Mountie Nelson made it look spry all right. He went right over the horse and disappeared in the brush on the other side as his steed galloped off without him. The bushes parted as Eddy poked his head through and said, "Too much spring, huh?" During the filming of "Rose Marie" the inhabitants of the village at the lake's edge had a treat every Sunday morning as Nelson Eddy and Jeanette MacDonald sang "The Indian Love Call" and other numbers from "Rose Marie" as well as religious songs amid the tall pines of the High Sierras.

"Rose Marie" also gave a newcomer to the screen one of his early and first important roles. This young fellow had been kicking around the back lot getting nowhere fast. Van Dyke had watched him in a few lesser roles and spotted a deep sincerity that he knew could be developed into a great talent. Woody asked for him for the part of John Fowler, Jeanette's brother, in the story — an escaped convict who was being hunted by the Mounties headed by Sergeant Bruck (Nelson Eddy). He gave an outstanding performance and went right on from there. He was grateful ever after for the opportunity Van Dyke gave him and, too, for Woody's help in convincing him of the value of remaining just plain Jimmy Stewart.

The next episode in the Jeanette MacDonald — Van Dyke "feudin'" occurred when the "Rose Marie" company returned from location for studio shots. A scene in the picture called for the star to fall off a horse into the river. To get the proper close-ups of Jeanette seated in the river, the studio water tank was used. The tank, located inside a special stage, had high sides that provided no means of entrance or escape other than by a ladder which was lowered down inside. It was built in this manner to give the camera boom a clear sweep. There was not enough water in the tank to drown a person, but it was still very wet water and decidedly uncomfortable. Van was shooting close-ups of "Rose Marie" sitting in the "river" and Jeanette wondered why he had scheduled these shots so close to the noon hour. She didn't know he had tipped off everyone, even her maid, that the minute the clock struck twelve they were to quit work immediately and leave the stage for lunch. They finished the take, a whistle blew, it was twelve o'clock. The camera boom swung up and out of the tank, there was an exodus out the door and lights went out. A dead calm enveloped the deserted stage. A sickly feeling came over Jeanette as she realized she was alone. She knew she was utterly helpless down in the dark and gloomy water tank. The only possible way she could get out was to scream for help. She was on the verge of becoming a "prima donna" of the first order when the woman in her said, "Oh no — I know this is one of Mr. Van's pranks and that's just what he wants me to do. If foxy grandpa thinks he is going to get me to scream for help . . . I'll sit here if I have to wait until he comes back from lunch." After ten minutes or so, she heard soft footsteps as someone tiptoed across the set toward the water tank . . . a few moments of absolute silence . . . and then she saw the outline of a man's head as he peered over the side of the tank. The beam of a flashlight swung across the water and there, huddled up in a corner, sat "Rose Marie" tightly holding her knees close to her tummy. One eye was closed, her lips set, and lower jaw sticking out. She looked up at Mr. Van Dyke. The water foamed as her right foot beat impatiently up and down. Woody said, "You little devil. I might have known you'd drown before you'd ever yell for help." He had become worried over his leading lady and very dear friend, and when he didn't hear her scream, thought she might have fainted. The crew, who were all standing by, were given the signal, the lights were turned on, they lowered the ladder, she changed her wet garments and they all had luncheon together.

It was during the filming of "Rose Marie" that Nelson Eddy turned the tables on Van Dyke. Eddy's hobby was sculpturing and he talked Van Dyke into sitting for a bust. Van Dyke agreed and Eddy directed him for awhile, making him pose in most unusual positions while scaling the measurements of his head. The Screen Directors' Guild offices in both New York and Hollywood were given bronze reproductions of the bust, as were several of his closest friends.

Dr. Edouard Lippé will never forget Van Dyke. Lippé, an inquisitive little fellow, could ask more questions than the most eager passenger on a sightseeing bus. Every time they were ready to shoot, Dr. Lippé had noticed that just as Van Dyke called out "Turn 'em" the cameraman snapped a switch on a small box attached to the side of the camera. The box and all of its wires intrigued Lippé. He asked Van Dyke what happened when the cameraman snapped the switch and Van gave him a fabulous story. He told him the box was hooked up to every sound stage in the studio and the snapping of the switch cut off all other activity on the lot when they were making a take.

"Practically shuts down the whole studio then, doesn't it?" said Lippé.

"You bet it does!" replied Van Dyke.

Lippé took it all in and then got the urge. If he could only snap that switch just once some day. Bill Daniels, cameraman, saw what a thrill the Doctor would get out of it, so told him he would let him kick it on the following morning.

Morning came. Nelson Eddy and the entire cast were in their places. Van quickly explained the action and everything was all set to start work. It was Saturday and Woody said to the cast, "You know how I like football — now if you all keep on your toes we can make this scene in one take." He reminded everyone on stage that if they didn't blow the scene they could all go home, get paid for a day, and he could see his football game. Dr. Lippé was standing at Bill Daniels' elbow as excited as a kid who had been promised he could blow the railroad engine's whistle. "Now?" he asked. "No, not just yet," said Bill softly. But in a few moments Van gave the signal. "Quiet, everybody! OK, Bill, roll 'em!" Daniels turned to Lippé. "NOW!" he said. Lippé's hand shot forward and snap went the switch.

A terrific explosion shook the stage . . . then another . . . and another. Daniels registered horror as the top of his camera blew off and film went flying all over the place. Four big lights came crashing down from the ramps and the scenery tumbled to the floor of the stage. The air became cluttered as men with hand bellows pumped blue smoke into the vicinity of the camera. Woody screamed, "Who threw that switch?" The limp Dr. Edouard meekly said "Me." Van Dyke yelled, "Do you know what you've done?" shaking his fist at him accusingly. Edouard, now shaking so hard he could barely speak, said, "I'll be glad to pay for the film if that'll help any." That was too much for Van Dyke and Eddy and they had to let Dr. Lippé in on the gag. No actual damage had been done. A crew of electricians and prop men had worked all night hooking up the various effects. The explosions had been "Pop" Arnold and his crew firing shotguns under barrels.

In telling his friends about the incident, Dr. Lippé said, "I was one of the lesser fry or small guys that Woody gathered unto himself among his stauncher friends. There were many of us and he saw to it that he kept us all bound to him by a bond far stronger than the proverbial silver cord. In my case there was a feeling akin to the hero worship a fellow has for a high school prof or college athletic coach. It's hard to describe the 'yes, sir' and 'no, sir' which would always spring to one's lips when talking with Mr. Van Dyke. There was always an eagerness on my part to break through that 'yes, sir — no, sir, Mr. Van Dyke' routine and achieve a more intimate and closer appellation. However, I never had the chance to do the breaking. 'Woody' took care of that himself."

Much water had gone under the bridge since Nelson Eddy's first screen test as a result of a fluke engagement at the Philharmonic Auditorium in Los Angeles. The same young blond baritone who, after his second attempt on the screen, was practically on his way out as far as movies were concerned, had become one of the greatest box office draws in musical history. He was the idol of millions on concert stage, radio and screen.

The idea to present the music of light opera on the screen had not only proved eminently successful for the movies but also opened up a new field for the concert stage. Nelson Eddy found that thousands of his movie fans, who had never gone to recitals before, now attended his concerts. He didn't change the type of numbers he selected for his programs, but for encores he sang numbers requested by the audience. Invariably these were for songs from "Naughty Marietta," "Rose Marie," "Sweethearts," "New Moon" and "Bittersweet."

Chapter 32

A DIRECTOR'S RIGHT HAND

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

A Director's Right Hand

As the movie had grown, crafts had become more technical and highly specialized. Among the most important of the crafts was photography.

Cinematography had developed into an art that required great skill and a long period of training. If the cameraman didn't know his business, the combined effort and skill of everyone on the set would be seriously jeopardized. And, too, if he was slow he could bog down a whole unit, and time was money on stage. The cinematographer must not only understand composition, angles and lighting, he must also be the master of back lighting, shading, soft focus, proper close-ups, iris-dissolve, panorama shots, cut-backs and multiple other effects; and he must know how to execute them fast as called for by the director.

Van always said a good cameraman was a director's right hand, therefore he always promoted the interests of the assistants in every way he could and encouraged them to become masters of their art.

Trouble was brewing among the assistant cameramen. They had asked for a raise and had been refused but a big banquet was arranged by the studio. The producers hoped to justify, during the course of the evening, their refusal to grant the raise. The second cameramen were all present. The principal speaker of the evening was a top-flight executive in the business. In his talk to the men he told them that the wages they were requesting were equal to those paid the presidents of banks. He pointed out that the banking institutions were the backbone of our national economy. "Surely," he said, "you don't mean to imply that your occupations are as important to our national economic security as are the talents of those outstanding men!" That was a masterful bit of psychology. The cameramen could almost be seen shrinking in their seats. The meeting was about to adjourn. W. S. Van Dyke had been invited as a guest and had been seated at the speakers' table. He hadn't said a word all evening. He rose slowly and asked if he might say a few words. Permission was granted and in his deliberate and direct way he addressed the speaker. "You're not quite fair in your reasoning, sir," he said. "The salary of the president of the United States is considerably less than your annual basic income, and surely you don't mean to imply that your position is of greater importance to our national economy than is that of our President!" Van Dyke sat down. The meeting was abruptly terminated. The next day the trade papers were full of it. Stories flew thick and fast. It was rumored Van had been fired. But he hadn't been fired; he stayed where he was. The second cameramen got their raise and Hollywood settled down again for another cool twenty-four hours.

Van Dyke and Robert Z. Leonard shared the same reception room. Their offices were located at the end of a wing in one of the buildings with the receptionist's office in the middle. Bob Leonard claimed the distinction of being the only person who dared disturb Woody during his noon hour. Van had a rule of relaxing for thirty minutes each day after lunch and he was rabid in his insistence on not being disturbed during that period. But there are exceptions to some rules and "Pop" Leonard was the exception to this one. The two directors were discussing the cameramen's affair and the subject of cinematography. Woody looked up at the wall and said, "Suppose, Pop, that wall were a screen. You'd never have a movie without a picture up there. And as long as you have a picture, you fundamentally still have the old stereoscope as your basis to work from and somebody's got to get that picture on the wall." Van continued, "It doesn't make any difference if that figure talks or sings, it's still a picture and the picture will always be the foundation or basis of the movies. What you see with the eye is the important thing — that governs your thinking and that's what people are looking at. All that sound or voice will ever do is to embellish the objects on the screen!"

The lunch period was over. "So long, kid," said Van as both directors headed back to their respective stages. Robert Z. couldn't recall a single instance when Van Dyke had called him Leonard. It was always "Hi, kid" or "Bob." From L. B. Mayer to prop boy, it was "Hi, kid." . . . Garbo to script girl, "Hi, honey." In fact, when Van first reported to the lot, Helen Jepson, Robert Leonard's secretary, shared the office with Florence Thomas, Van's secretary. Helen was startled one day when Van came barging out of his office and said,

"Who's Helen Jepson?"

Helen replied, "What did you say?"

"Who's Helen Jepson? She sent me a lovely birthday card and I want to acknowledge it."

Miss Jepson, with an embarrassed smile, pointed to herself and said, "That's me!"

Chapter 33

THE SATURDAY NIGHT GUYS

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

The Saturday Night Guys

"Open House at Van Dyke's Tomorrow! Come One, Come All!" The day before Christmas, Fourth of July, or any other holiday, that sign was apt to be tacked up all around the M-G-M lot. Any excuse for a party. It was always open house at Van's. Battles may still be fought over who is Hollywood's number one hostess, but there never was any question about who was its most successful host.

"I get a kick out of seeing people have a good time," he'd say. "I moved around so much as a kid I always had to make new friends, and I've just continued to do so." Woody's Hollywood career, as far as parties were concerned, began shortly after he returned from Tahiti filming "White Shadows in the South Seas." A group of his old pals and friends organized an outfit and called themselves "The Saturday Night Guys." This was an "exclusive" club as far as the original membership was concerned. To divest themselves of the unspent energy of a week of movie making, Van Dyke, Buck Jones, Howard Strickling, Tim McCoy, Ralph Wheelright, Edgar Kennedy and Steve Brody started the outfit. It wasn't difficult to join. All one had to do to become a member was live dangerously . . . or bump into this bunch anywhere on a Saturday night. Doc Houghton, famous professional witness who specialized in dead bodies for the police in murder cases, soon joined up. Then Spike Moody and Frank Dewar, two of Los Angeles County's most famous deputy sheriffs, joined. Spike and Frank were tough when it came to dealing with rough customers and had become famous and colorful characters throughout the nation because of their numerous gun fights with law-breakers. Then Buck Jones started to add some of his cowboy friends and "The Saturday Night Guys" became quite a famous Hollywood outfit.

They would always stag it on Saturday nights and never ate in restaurants or public places. Many an unsuspecting chap was visited by this gang. They'd start out en masse and go from one fellow's house to another, sometimes making as many as twenty stops a night. And it wasn't unusual for them to drop in way after midnight. If the "host" was asleep — good. Van loved to get people out of bed, raid their kitchen and whip up a feast. One Saturday night while enroute they bumped into a chap on the street. He was congenial and they liked his looks. "Where do you live?" said Van, and the next thing the stranger knew he was a full-fledged member of the Saturday Night Guys and they were setting up a meal in his kitchen.

Before they had gone into this new member's house they had checked their "shootin' irons" with their secretary. The men were all regular or special deputy sheriffs or police officers so carried guns. Howard Strickling, the secretary, put the guns in the back of Van's roadster to be sure they'd be safe. After cleaning up the food, the bunch began to vocalize and ended up singing Woody's favorite song, "What'll We Be Doing Fifty Years From Now? — Pushin' Up the Dai-sies, Pushin' Up the Dai-sies." The party broke up and the gang went on to another house. Strickling, who had left earlier than the rest, forgot to tell Van about the guns in the back of his car. After a night of fun the men reported back to their jobs but were without their guns. They called Van Dyke but he didn't know anything about them. Deputy sheriffs and special police officers had to borrow guns while the greatest deadly weapon hunt in Los Angeles County was under way. Woody called Howard Strickling but he was out of town. Later, Van's colored boy — Napoleon, drove into a gas station for fuel and oil. An attendant raised up the turtle back of his car to check the spare tire and ran for the police when he saw the back end full of guns. It took Van Dyke and half the sheriff's squad to get Napoleon out of jail. The real owners retrieved their guns and the Saturday Night Guys were ready for another weekend. They were always geared up and rarin' to go — just having a swell time.

When the "Guys" weren't making calls, Woody spent much time with the Sheriff's Homicide Squad or in Los Angeles Night Court. He was always looking for color, and watched the emotions and reactions of those involved with a photographic eye. In this way he had captured much of the realism seen in "Penthouse," "Night Court" and "Manhattan Melodrama." Even while Van was playing he was working observing people and their emotional reactions under trying circumstances. He also spent a lot of time at a spaghetti joint near the bail bond offices for the same purpose.

Van Dyke never held a party in his little apartment. He had waited until he got his own home and then made up for lost time. He entertained many in his Hollywood Hills home, but his three and a half acre Brentwood Heights estate became the showplace for some of the best parties in town. He hadn't gone highbrow, but the number of Van's friends had so increased it took the facilities of his Brentwood estate to keep them entertained and fed. It was ideally laid out. You turned into the driveway, drove up under the porte cochere, unloaded the guests and parked the car in a space big enough for a drill ground. Across the driveway there was a lawn that looked like a putting green, a swimming pool too inviting to pass up, and alongside it a combination roofed patio, barbecue pit, buffet and dressing rooms, and, beyond that, a badminton court. In the house you entered a spacious hallway, stepped from that into the reception room, or into any one of a half dozen other rooms where the party might be going on. Whether he knew his guest or not, Van made him feel at home. "I made up my mind," he said, "if I ever had money I'd get a place where my friends could get together." He certainly made use of 334 Bundy Drive.

As the nature of Van's professional life had changed, so had his pleasure seeking. The obstreperous methods of the Saturday Night Guys had given way to the more legitimate confines of their new setting. At any affair at Van's home, one was apt to see Mr. and Mrs. Buck Jones, Mr. and Mrs. Howard Strickling, Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz, and other former "Saturday Night Guyers" elbowing with the D. W. Griffiths, Mrs. Mabel Walker Willebrandt, Dr. Edouard Lippé, United States District Attorney Pearson Hall, Clark Gable, Jeanette MacDonald, Nelson Eddy or Jimmy Stewart. Van's mother, of course, was always on hand if it was a party.

On Sunday afternoons in and around the swimming pool would be Freddie Bartholomew, Jackie Cooper, Mickey Rooney and a dozen other members of the Screen Boys' Club which Van had organized. And sitting around the patio, house and badminton court would be mothers, fathers, sisters, girl friends, neighborhood kids — in fact, anyone who happened by. He never permitted anything to take from him his pleasure and his joy. In his estimation, joy was one of the most important things in living and he injected it into everything he did, whether at work or at play.

Van Dyke never grew out of his child's heart insofar as this enthusiasm was concerned. His was an inexhaustible energy like the kid who pats mud pies all day long and never tires. That mud is gold to the child heart and Van Dyke's pictures and life were gold to him. He never started a picture or held a party that he wasn't excited about and, rightly or wrongly, felt was the best "mud pie" he'd ever made. This was exemplified by the standing order at his Brentwood estate that the first Sunday in every month the swimming pool was the property of all the kids in the neighborhood. It made no difference who the kids were, they were all welcome. And, to put a little punch in the affair as well as to be certain no youngster drowned, Tarzan in person — Johnny Weismuller, Cotton Warburton — U.S.C. football star, and other stalwart champions were regular life guards at the affairs . . . with Van Dyke being pulled out or thrown in more than any other "kid" in the lot of them.

Woody's parties were famous the world over, because people the world over had attended them. They were as varied as his movies — no two quite the same. There were those parties that were considered a part of every picture he filmed. After the final shot was made, the entire cast, crew and their friends gathered at Woody's to celebrate. Then there were parties for his own personal friends. While Van enjoyed the company of his associates on the lot, many of his more intimate friends were not of his profession. These included famous professional and political leaders as well as outstanding military men. Frequently they gathered at Van's for a garden party or musicale. While Van's garden parties were always dignified and sedate, one was never quite sure what would happen with this kid-at-heart host when the studio gang or Saturday Night Guys got together for a clambake.

And there was also the portable dance floor Woody frequently rolled out on the green grass. Ray Bolger would start the show and then every guest present was required to give an exhibition dance — improvising the best he could. His mother never hesitated and Woody and she would show them some of the routines they used to do between acts when they were on the stage together.

These parties and the "Saturday Night Guys" all started while Van Dyke was a bachelor. When Van married Ruth Mannix she entered into the spirit of these parties, whether formal or informal, and was the perfect complement to him as Hollywood's number one host. After Barbara, Woodbridge Strong III, and Winston Van Dyke were born, Woody added a series of junior editions to the famous Van Dyke parties — and Senior was always the life of these kid affairs.

There was a domestic side to Van Dyke's life that also received the full force of his spontaneity. The fact that he had come into big money and outstanding success had not changed him in the least. He never forgot his old friends.

During his early life, the Van Dykes and the Robert B. McKenzies became the closest of friends, and where Woody went the McKenzie clan were likely to follow. When the McKenzies announced their daughter Ella, Van swore on the spot he would be her adopted brother until she married. Woody Van Dyke never made a promise lightly. Many years later, when Ella McKenzie drove out to Van's Brentwood home to tell him of her forthcoming wedding to Billy Gilbert, Van Dyke jumped up and said, "Great! We'll have the wedding right here!" Before Ella had a chance, Woody and his wife, Ruth, were making plans. It would be a garden wedding, they said; Ella had always thought they were the loveliest.

A beautiful bower of white asters, chrysanthemums, and gladioli was erected at the extreme end of his garden. A long strip of white canvas was stretched across the beautiful green lawn to the altar. White wicker posts decorated with gardenias stood on either side of the aisle, and four hundred folding chairs were placed to seat the invited guests.

Ella's husband-to-be, Billy Gilbert, was the famous screen comedian; therefore Van selected for ushers five of the screen's best known funny men, and one lone straight man. They were Joe Penner, Jack Oakie, Charlie Chase, Victor Moore, Harry (Parkyakarkus) Einstein, and straight man Preston Foster . . . all handsomely arrayed in white suits and coronation blue ties. The bride carried white orchids, gardenias and lilies of the valley, and wore a gown of white mousseline de soie with a graceful flowing veil of white tulle. Ella's sister, Ida McKenzie, was maid of honor. The bridesmaids included the younger sister, Fay McKenzie, and Edwina DeLeon, Virginia Hartman and Maxine Nash. They all wore bouffant frocks in graduating shades of peach mousseline de soie and each carried shower bouquets of Talisman roses.

Reine Davies' column, "HOLLYWOOD PARADE," in the Los Angeles EXAMINER, said:

> "It took a lot of courage to cast five comedians and one lone straight man in the roles of ushers, but fortunately they played it straight. But as Jack Oakie put it after it was all over, 'If I'd given Joe Penner the fish eye, or Billy Gilbert had started 'sneezing,' it would have gone up like a kite!' And there were those who thought the ushers gave more to wisecracking than they did to their

ushering. That is . . . until Mrs. Laura Winston Van Dyke, with tongue in cheek, threatened to 'complain to the management!' Undoubtedly it was the gayest wedding of the season."

Van Dyke's mother, looking like a bit of Dresden china in all gray lace and chiffon, was impressed by the reading and asked the Reverend Thomas Holden who wrote the beautiful ceremony, and he answered, "You should know — Henry Van Dyke!"

* * *

John Miljan, well known movie actor, had been the recipient of many of Woody's pranks and parties, so to get back at him one time on Van's birthday he purchased an old jallopy from a junk man and parked it in his driveway with a big card attached: "Happy Birthday, Van." Woody had to have a wrecking car pull it out of his driveway in order to get his own car out of the garage. The following Christmas Eve Van Dyke bought the oldest *bus* he could find and had it towed to John Miljan's for a Christmas present, parking it in his driveway. Miljan hired a crew of mechanics, got the bus to run and then filled the thirty seats with Saturday Night Guys and drove them all over to Van's the next day, cleaning his house out of Christmas cheer.

One of the most famous Van Dyke garden parties was held on a balmy summer afternoon — political friends, socialites and military men had gathered for the formal tea. The atmosphere of the garden resembled that of the foyer of the Metropolitan Opera during an intermission. A latecomer's car approached the gate. An immaculately dressed chauffeur stepped out of the big limousine, opened the iron gates and drove inside. The car stopped, the chauffeur got out and carefully closed the gates. Some of the dignitaries turned to see who had been detained. Before they had time to figure it out the air was filled with "yipping" and "yapping" as dogs of every description dashed madly and gaily over the grounds. Chairs toppled over backwards . . . some of the dogs hit the swimming pool and had a whale of a time . . . two matronly ladies squealed as a St. Bernard affectionately licked their cheeks . . . bull terriers, shepherds, scotties, spaniels, Mexican chihuahuas, fox terriers and "Dead End Kids" of the canine world scampered all over the gardens. John Miljan stood outside the gate, roaring with laughter. Hearing about Van's garden party, he had gone to the Los Angeles City Pound and purchased every dog there, rented a trailer and the beautiful black limousine, hired a chauffeur and had sent him to the party with explicit instructions to arrive late and then turn the dogs loose.

As soon as Van Dyke got the situation in hand, he saw Miljan standing outside the gate and caught on. But Woody put a reverse twist on the prank. When the guests departed, each car had an "adopted" dog sitting in the front seat.

The following year, John Miljan awakened early one morning to find his dogs had returned — hundreds of them. The front of his house looked like a delicatessen shop . . . wieners, bologna, sausages, large and small, were draped all over the place — strings of them hanging from the eaves to the ground.

Miljan invited the Saturday Night Guys over for a wiener feast that night. In the middle of the affair, Miljan casually remarked to Van Dyke, "How did you ever get those wieners tacked all over the front of my place without my knowing it?" Woody innocently replied, "Who? . . . Me?"

Chapter 34

COMMON-SENSE MOVIE MAKING

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

Common-Sense Movie Making

The movie is accepted as the most popular form of recreation of approximately ninety million people each week. Probably no industry receives as much publicity in newspapers, magazines and pictorial art. Most of this publicity is given to the stars, who are generally regarded as its principal box office draw.

But the key — the man responsible for the success or failure of a film — is the director. He is the coordinator who compounds all the talent that has been concentrated on a single story idea, and sees that it is brought to life on the screen. No other individual in the entire motion picture business assumes so great a responsibility.

W. S. Van Dyke II had to his credit many box office hits and was regarded by the industry as one of its most commercially successful directors. Though considered an authority on the subject of making movies he had no pretense. Few people could pin him down and get him to talk. Those who did, enjoyed a liberal education in common sense movie making. A friend of his — a prominent journalist — cornered him one day and got him on the subject of "dramatics" and modern movie making.

Van said, "Making movies has changed considerably in the twenty-three years I've been at it. The stereotyped precision, gestures and technique of the old stage acting no longer exist. One no longer 'reads' lines. Repressed emotion and restraint is the pattern. A mere quick dilation of the eyes can be more effective than a scream."

"The movie audience of today," Van continued, "is always a step ahead of the scene or situation. Usually your audience knows what you're going to do or say before you do or say it. Thus, to keep up with them, a successful director has to be quick and not let a scene drag — or else be ingenious enough to fool them. The being ingenious is the hard part. That's what comes from experience — plus, of course, good stories, good dialogue and good situations. Figure out how they would expect you to do a thing and then do it some other way. It's a method of keeping the audience interested— being 'fresh' about the slightest movement." Van Dyke was himself ingenious when it came to this method. He could make a highlight out of a situation the average person would consider ordinary . . . like the whistling scene in "White Shadows" and the "B-B" gun scene in "The Thin Man." He was ingenious in his ability to get actors to work naturally.

"People often enter the dramatic field with an 'arty' point of view," he said. "Vaguely they seek self-expression through dramatics. They pretend to abhor commercialism, wanting somehow to be 'artistic.' This is a major mistake, and no one who continues with this point of view can possibly succeed. Although the motion picture industry is in the business of manufacturing shadows and illusion, it must be practical and down-to-earth . . . and so must its actors. Making motion pictures is a business," Van continued, "and the aspiring young dramatist just doesn't graduate from a dramatic school and step onto the sound stage a star. Neither does one learn how to shoot home movies and then straddle a camera boom and get the kind of negative the business requires. It calls for ability, work, and, above all else, experience — and plenty of that."

Woody debunked "genius" in the movies or anywhere else. Work, he said, was the answer to most problems. "If it's acting one wants, first know there is a talent for it and then rehearse over and over and over again."

"The musician or vocalist doesn't achieve success without work. Hours and hours of tedious, patient practice on basic fundamentals result in perfect coordination physically and mentally. As a result of studious effort, the nimble fingers of the musician or the vocal chords of the concert artist respond spontaneously to their interpretation of the music of great composers; naturalness of expression is acquired by the actor through the same kind of effort — constant, patient work to gain perfect coordination. He must learn how to stand. He must learn how to walk. He must learn how to enunciate. In short, he must change from a mere individual into a highly polished reflector of the playwright or scenario writer's mood, emotion and feeling.

"Don't misunderstand me," he said. "I don't say there isn't a place for art in films. It's what the industry needs. But art is not 'arty;' again I say it is the result of hard work, patience, observation, intelligence and more hard work."

"Poise," he added, "is one of the most valuable qualifications a star or director can have. With it, one can face a camera, an audience or a critical situation without fear. And poise is the direct result of experience and being sure of one's self . . . it's knowing what you're doing. This can't be affected."

"To be natural is the best kind of acting there is. In real life, people don't begin speaking precisely when someone else has finished. They interrupt and overlap, and that's what good actors should do. They should move about naturally, speak naturally, and laugh naturally. This is true whether it's Garbo or Mickey Rooney."

"All of this adds up to one basic qualification — patience. Cultivate shatterproof patience, because if you become impatient you lose your poise. You get ruffled, frustrated — and then you cost the studio too much money in retakes. And if you cost the studio too much money, you may find yourself no longer in the business."

Few men in the motion picture profession had the advantage of Van Dyke's background. His experience as an actor had given him an understanding of the problems sometimes referred to as "temperament" when dealing with certain stars.

Garbo had been publicized as very hard to work with. She was sensitive, they said, and extremely emotional. Only certain directors were assigned to her pictures. Some difficulty arose during the cutting and editing of "The Painted Veil," and the studio felt some of the scenes should be remade. The director who had filmed the picture was ill. Because of the loss of valuable time and in order to meet the release date, Mr. Mayer asked Van Dyke to make the retakes.

Garbo and Van Dyke had been on the same lot for years but they had never met. Because of Van Dyke's reputation, there was much speculation as to what would happen. Van Dyke had learned early in life, however, in his kid fights never to move unless he was sure he could handle the situation.

Van Dyke changed his usual procedure when he started the retakes on "The Painted Veil." He didn't arrive on the set ahead of everybody else this time. The cast and crew were there but he remained in his office. His assistant had been given explicit orders to telephone him the instant Garbo arrived on the stage ready to shoot. The telephone rang, "Garbo's here," and Van was quickly driven to the set. He called out orders as he crossed the stage. "Okay, light 'em up." "Places, everybody — let's go!" Woody walked over to Garbo, "Hi, Honey," took her by the arm and walked her through the scene. Before she had an opportunity to speak, Van Dyke said to the cameraman, "Okay, kid, turn 'em over!" Garbo was amused, smiled and went through the scenes without a retake. After the picture was finished Garbo said, "I shall never forget 'one-take' Woody Van Dyke!"

Van Dyke had told his interviewer, "Being ingenious is the hard part . . . figure out how they would expect you to do a thing and then do it some other way." One of Van Dyke's most outstanding examples of how this theory worked was in the picture, "San Francisco."

Despite the fact that he had three of the screen's top-flight names as principal characters in the cast — Clark Gable, Jeanette MacDonald and Spencer Tracy — he made the "star" an earthquake and fire. Probably no other scene was ever given footage equal to that of the earthquake and fire sequence in "San Francisco."

Van Dyke had been a reserve officer in the United States Marine Corps for many years. He knew of no group of men more thoroughly qualified to handle emergencies or more reliable when it came to carrying out orders than a corps of regular Marines. Therefore, he engaged an entire company of Marines to aid him in staging this spectacular sequence. It was rehearsed for three full days before Van would start shooting. Every person involved moved like a well-trained infantryman in an artillery creeping barrage. It was the most spectacular exhibition of destruction ever photographed, but not one person was injured. The earthquake and fire took up twenty minutes in the finished version of the film — practically one-fifth the length of the picture. It was so realistic that many people at the premiere at the Chinese Theatre in Hollywood thought there was a real earthquake and started to leave the theatre.

Probably nowhere in the world is so much talent concentrated on a single project as in the movie business. First there is the acquisition of the story which, in its raw literary form, may run into an enormous sum of money. The idea is then adapted to the screen. This rewriting sometimes requires months. Copies of the finished script are distributed to various department heads and an over-all production plan is put into operation. Miniature scale models of all the sets are made. Director, producer and the head of the construction department carefully check over every angle of the miniature to plan successive stages of shooting so there will be no lost time in moving from one scene to the other. Working out the sets in miniature has often saved thousands of dollars. Changing a doorway or passage on the miniature is simple while planning a shooting schedule, whereas if it had to be done on a finished set the cost would run into hundreds of dollars.

When the story is on film the director's job is still not complete. There is the final cutting, editing and musical scoring. This is comparable to the fine sewing in dressmaking. Many good movies have been ruined in cutting and editing. Pictures like "Naughty Marietta" and "Rose Marie" require weeks of concentrated work in musical scoring. Herbert Stothart, head of the music department at M-G-M, had in his department an orchestra, forty composers, arrangers, coaches, librarians and reams of musical scores. Every feature and short subject made on the lot must have a special musical background. Stothart said of Van Dyke: "He would never let even a seemingly unimportant musical passage stay in a picture if he thought something else would fit the scene better."

Van's ability was not phenomenal, nor was it a freak talent. It was the result of his experience . . . his doggedness . . . and the fact that he was by nature a demon for work.

Chapter 35

NORMA SHEARER AND "MARIE ANTOINETTE"

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

Norma Shearer and "Marie Antoinette"

"Marie Antoinette" was to be one of the most pretentious pictures ever undertaken on the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer lot. A huge budget had been set and a cast of stellar names was to be headed by the lovely star, Norma Shearer.

Period pictures, or stories covering some period in world history, have their greatest value in foreign markets. The story of "Marie Antoinette," it was expected, would have great popular appeal in Europe. The picture would have to be done with an extraordinary degree of authenticity and strict attention to detail for European audiences are very critical. Months of research are required before such a story can be filmed. Producer, director, writers, wardrobe, makeup and production departments work hand-in-hand during the preparatory stage to insure authenticity in sets, costume, makeup and coiffure.

Irving Thalberg, who was conceded to be one of the greatest creative minds of his day, had supervised the activity on "Marie Antoinette" from its inception and was to produce and direct the film. Much time and money had been spent in preparatory work on the picture when a succession of incidents delayed production to the extent that the situation became serious. Irving Thalberg suddenly passed on. The shock was so great to his wife, Norma Shearer, and to all who were close to Mr. Thalberg, that the picture was postponed. After about six months, activity was resumed and another producer and director were assigned. The new staff had worked approximately five months in familiarizing themselves with the requirements of the film when the director was suddenly taken ill. To add to the complexities of the problem, the American movie industry found itself faced with the prospect of losing its foreign market due to complication in pending contracts. The loss of this income would have been particularly unfortunate as far as "Marie Antoinette" was concerned because the company needed the profits of the European market to assure financial success of the picture. M-G-M became concerned over the additional cost of getting the story on film, which is always governed by the length of time consumed in shooting.

L. B. Mayer wanted to ask Van Dyke to direct the shooting but he didn't know whether that would be wise. Norma Shearer had been absent from the screen for about a year, since the passing of her husband, and to keep up with a fast shooting schedule might be too much to ask of her. And, too, Mayer thought, without the help and guidance of Irving Thalberg, she might feel the need of a more mild-mannered director than Van Dyke. Nevertheless, he called Miss Shearer into his office and said, "Norma, would you have any objections if we asked Van Dyke to direct this picture?" Much to his delight, Miss Shearer said she had no objections at all . . . "Whatever you think is best, Mr. Mayer." She actually did feel that Van Dyke might have a natural prejudice in directing her because she worked slowly and carefully and Van Dyke, she knew, was brusque and fast. However, she did not indicate her personal feeling to Mr. Mayer.

L. B. called Van Dyke into his office and explained the position the studio was in . . . the situation in the foreign market, and the problem Miss Shearer was facing. Van agreed to do the picture despite the fact that he knew nothing else about the set-up thus far.

It was Saturday morning when Mr. Mayer had called him into his office. He had just finished shooting "Rosalie." Van was given a script of "Marie Antoinette" and he spent the balance of the weekend with producer, writers, and production heads, and started shooting the following Monday. It was like the time D. W. Griffith finished "The Birth of a Nation" on Sunday and started shooting "Intolerance" on Monday.

As the starting date drew near, Miss Shearer did become apprehensive because of Van's reputation as a speed demon. She began to imagine herself being whisked from one scene to another. The more she thought about it the more uneasy she became. But surely, she thought, he wouldn't shoot a picture like "Marie Antoinette" so fast. Nevertheless, she was determined to fulfill her part of the bargain. Recalling Jeanette MacDonald's experience as a result of not being ready when Van Dyke called for her, Norma Shearer determined never to be late or absent from the set.

Much to everyone's surprise, "Marie Antoinette" arrived on the set ahead of schedule for the first day's shooting. As the lovely little star nervously came onto the set, Woody grasped her by the hand with a "Hi, honey" that melted her "dithers" away. Later, during lunch, she told L. B. Mayer of this first meeting. She said, "It was so much more reassuring than if he had been painstakingly polite. I might have felt he was using the diplomatic approach to a 'difficult' star — but by that simple and friendly greeting he made me feel he really liked me." She told Mr. Mayer that, while there wasn't the usual "Quiet, please" before each rehearsal, she found that, in his off-hand way, Van actually expressed more consideration than the type of director who makes a more elaborate show of it.

After the first meeting of star and director and the completion of rehearsals and general reviewing of the work to be done, the unit reported back to the stage after lunch for their first takes.

The setting for the first shot was that of a gambling house and the scene was to be the one in which Marie Antoinette wagers her diamond necklace in a bet that she can produce a Russian. As she is about to lose the wager, Tyrone Power makes his entrance. Marie is to see him from the balcony, dash to the top of the stairs, run down them swiftly and cross the floor to his side, asking "Can you speak Russian?" Ty is to answer "No . . . Swedish!" She is to plead, "Oh please, you must help me! You see, we were playing forfeits and I had the most appalling luck! I lost all of my money . . . my allowance . . . my coach and horses! And, I shall lose this necklace if I can't produce a Russian!" He, of course, agrees, says, "Russian it is then!" and thus Marie Antoinette's love story with Count Axel Fersen of Sweden begins.

Miss Shearer, determined to show Van Dyke that she could work fast too, indicated that she didn't want a rehearsal. Van, with a twinkle in his eye, started to shoot the scene. She took her first cue like the veteran she was. Ty made his entrance, Marie spied him, picked up her hoop skirt and flew across the balcony. In her great haste to get on the set on time, she hadn't given the wardrobe mistress a chance to fasten everything securely — a bracelet went this way, an earring that way. She ran down the stairs so fast she stumbled on the bottom step and nearly fell. She grabbed the railing, but the jolt of the sudden stop threw her beautiful wig down over one eye, and the artificial eyelash on her other eyelid fell to the floor. Poor Marie Antoinette was a sight. Van Dyke, amused, said, "Say, what's all the rush? — we don't have to finish this picture tomorrow, you know!" The damage from Miss Shearer's self-imposed whisking through the scene was hastily repaired and the shot completed. It was the only time in the entire filming that Norma Shearer had a sense of being rushed.

By the time they had been shooting a few days she knew why Van seldom made mistakes. The instant he came to a scene or point in history that he was not perfectly sure of himself, he stopped shooting and insisted on obtaining the necessary data from an expert on the subject.

"Marie Antoinette" was filmed in January, February and March, which, in California, is the rainy season. One day in March the company was working on the Revolution sequence. The shot to be photographed was the exciting riot scene in which the belligerents break into the quarters of the King and Queen and tear their children from them. Panic holds sway. Such scenes are difficult to get and are very trying on the cast and all concerned. To add to the problems of the day the California rain hit. It was one of those occasions that gave Los Angeles the reputation of always doing things in a big way. Canyons became waterfalls; streets were rivers; automobiles were stalled all over town; the entire cast had been delayed in getting to the studio. Many of the cast and crew were apprehensive about the safety of their homes and families. It was not easy for them to keep their minds centered on the problems of Louis the Sixteenth.

Van had a short wave radio brought onto the stage so the cast and crew could hear police broadcasts regarding conditions on the outside. Norma Shearer's home was located on the ocean front at the foot of the Pacific Palisades in Santa

Monica and it was rumored that that area might be washed out. The usual exaggeration about the situation and talk of tidal floods ensued and she became more concerned over the security of her children.

The radio would be turned off. "Let's go!" Van would say, and "Marie Antoinette's" mind would have to leap from thoughts of her children in Santa Monica to thoughts of "children" two hundred years before. After a scene was played, Miss Shearer would run back to the telephone and call her home to see if everything was all right. In a few minutes she was again in the eighteenth century in another riot scene. Cameras started to roll.

The mad crowds break into the palace from all sides. The bewildered Queen stands in the center of the scene horrified. At a given cue, when the crowd seizes her children, she is to dash across the stage and try to save them. Her cue came. "Marie Antoinette" picked up her hoop skirts and started across the set but the ring on the hoop broke and the bulky skirt dropped to the floor. Norma tripped and did the prettiest head-over-heals somersault ever seen on any sound stage. The hoop went over her head as she fell and all that was visible for the moment was pink petticoats and white pantaloons. The cameras stopped. Van helped her up and she rushed back to the radio just in time to hear the police announce that only one road to Santa Monica remained open. Miss Shearer got the Beverly Hills Hotel on the telephone, arranged for a suite of rooms and, between the next few scenes, "Marie Antoinette" got her Santa Monica family out of danger.

All through the day Van calmly shot his riot scenes. The conditions outside served him well. His cast was worried and he took advantage of that fact. The scene called for apprehension and he most assuredly got it.

It is customary, when a unit moves on to a new set, to have the cast report without makeup and wardrobe in the morning to walk through the action and business of the scene. This enables them to become familiar with doors, props, lights, steps . . . . The prison set had just been completed and the cast had reported on Saturday morning for rehearsal of the important scene showing Marie Antoinette in prison. The King had been beheaded and her children had been taken away. In solitary confinement, in a small, damp cell — without friends and the whole world now against her — the Queen was in the depths of despair. The action called for Count Fersen to enter the dark cell, having offered his life to the French Government in exchange for a last few moments with his Queen. The Queen, her face thin, her eyes sunken, in drab prison gray, stripped of her jewels and stunned at the sudden turn of events, turns her gaze to the door of her cell as it opens. The light from outside blinds her for a moment and she can't see who has entered the narrow prison room. As her vision clears she recognizes her lover and a dramatic scene follows in which they bid one another farewell. Drums roll, the prison scene fades and the action cuts to the crowd outside awaiting Marie Antoinette's execution at the guillotine.

After familiarizing themselves with the layout and talking over the action of the scene, Van said he felt the dialogue was too wordy and should be rewritten. However, the writing staff and all other administrative departments were off on Saturday afternoon, so that couldn't be done until the following week. But, Woody said, as long as they were all there, they might as well see what they could do with the scene. So, like three kids, Norma Shearer, Ty Power and Van sat down on the floor, Indian style, and went over the script line by line, word by word. Van said, "I don't think that line's necessary, do you, Ty?" "Nope," replied Tyrone Power, and out it came. Woody turned then to Norma, "I think this is too elaborately written, don't you?" She nodded her head in approval. "The emotional tenseness of the situation itself should carry the scene with but few words," she replied. Van Dyke agreed and said, "Let's have lunch."

This had been fun and quite a relief for Shearer and Power as they, too, had felt the spot was wordy. It was to be their big moment in the picture and they had every right to be concerned. Enthusiastic now over the way the cuts worked out, they were anxious to shoot the scene. But it was Saturday noon; they were the only company working and the executive offices were closed. Miss Shearer thought, certainly one doesn't just sit down and rewrite a whole scene like that and shoot it without checking with the front office! But Van Dyke hadn't dismissed the company. He had merely said "Let's have lunch!" Hoping he might let them do the take, both stars went to wardrobe and makeup and reported back to the stage after lunch. As they walked onto the set, Van blatted out, "Doggone it! This is Saturday afternoon. Why should we be working — nobody else is! And anyway, we can't shoot this scene until it's rewritten next week!" Norma and Ty thought this ended it and were about to leave the stage but Van continued, "But as long as you're both made up, let's shoot the scene once just to see how it plays." This was what Shearer and Power had hoped he would do. They reviewed the cuts made before lunch and Van said, "Okay, kids, once over lightly, eh?"

With complete freedom and a sense of being absolutely on their own, Norma Shearer and Tyrone Power took their places on stage. LIGHTS! TAKE 504! QUIET PLEASE! ACTION! "Okay, roll 'em, Bill." Van Dyke stood quietly, close to the camera. The set is almost in darkness. A bolt rattles, and the cell door is flung open. Silhouetted against the light from the hall of the prison stands Count Fersen, the Governor just behind him. They are barely visible. Van Dyke motions to the cameraman, and he pans away from them, moving in to a close shot of Marie Antoinette. She is seated on a little bed, dimly seen in the darkness. She lifts her hand to shield her eyes from the light, which, though not strong, half blinds her in the blackness of the cell. The door clanks shut as the Governor leaves, and darkness befalls the prison again. Marie Antoinette drops her hand from her eyes, and speaks dully, "It is time?" Her manner reflects the attitude of one beaten into insensibility by unceasing, merciless blows of an incredible destiny. There is no answer to her question. Staring through the gloom of the narrow walls, she slowly recognizes the man who stands there. Fersen, with bowed head and hands clenched is overwhelmed with the appalling change in his Queen. He is afraid to speak, lest his emotions master him. "It is you," she says, " . . . you've come! I hardly knew you." And then with an exquisite politeness and sincere heartfelt touch the Queen continues, "You must forgive me . . . it is so dark in here . . . always, and my sight has grown dim." Fersen moves close to her. She looks up into his drawn and anguished face . . . "There are tears in your eyes." There is a pause and she continues, "I have no tears . . . I shall be a little afraid, perhaps, when I see . . . " She stops suddenly and stares upward as though impelled by the shadow of the guillotine above her head reflected on the ceiling of the prison cell. "It's quick, they say . . . !" Fersen half turns his face to the wall, unable to bear more. She steps closer, "Take me in your arms . . . as you did, that other dawn." His arms close about her . . . her head falls to his shoulder. Marie Antoinette and her lover stand embraced, as they had done years before, at the palace door, at the rising of the sun. Tyrone Power's face is in the shadow, the faint light from the rising sun breaks through a crack in the boarded window and dimly falls on Norma Shearer's face. She closes her eyes . . . her voice now faint as she speaks, "When it's over . . . don't be grieved . . . say to yourself . . . she is asleep, she was tired — tired, and now she is at rest."

"That's it! That's it!" said Van Dyke as he unconsciously snapped his fingers. "Print it! It was great!" Norma Shearer and Ty Power were delighted, but the sound engineer called out, "I'm sorry, Mr. Van Dyke . . . but the sound track caught the snapping of your fingers and ruined the take." Van Dyke put his hand to his forehead as he sank into his chair, "How do you like that!!" Norma and Ty were sick about it. This kind of a scene can very easily be overplayed, and they had gone through it without a hitch. They could never do the scene any better. They didn't have to tell Van Dyke that. He knew what he had on that film. What's more, he knew he wouldn't get another shot like that if they did it over fifty times. He had intended all along to do the scene, and had been conniving all day to get his stars off guard.

"Wait a minute!" he said as he jumped to his feet. "It's okay! That shot's good. We dub in the drum rolls right there and they'll never hear the finger snapping over that. Print it!"

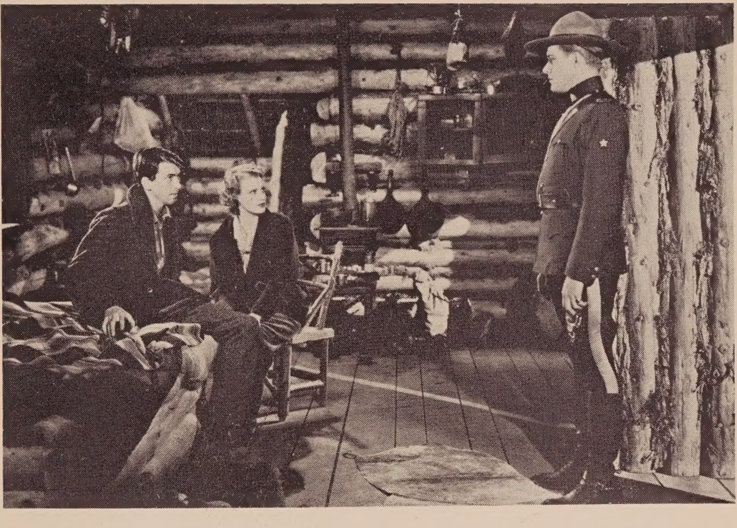
They never tried another take. The shot was perfect in mood and timing. No one ever heard Van Dyke snapping his fingers at the end of the scene. That is, no one except Norma Shearer, who swore that every time she ran the film she could hear Van snapping his fingers under the roll of the drums.

Van Dyke had done what L. B. Mayer had asked him to do — shoot it fast. The picture was completed in ten weeks and at a cost of less than two million dollars. Few people in the industry believed those figures were true as everyone who saw "Marie Antoinette" thought it one of the most expensive films ever produced. The budget on such a picture would normally average between three and four million dollars. Time had been the factor and Van's ability to shoot fast had been the answer.

They made the foreign market and the picture was a great success both in the United States and abroad. The premiere at the Carthay Circle Theatre in Los Angeles was one of the most elaborate ever staged. The fans had gathered at six in the morning and by noon all of the seats in the bleachers outside the theatre had been taken. They had brought their lunches, books and magazines to be able to get a seat so they would get a close-up glimpse of the screen's most lovely and gracious star. Thousands of spectators "oh-ed" and "ah-ed" as they saw Norma Shearer, in crispy white organdie banded in black Valenciennes lace, a white fox cape and corsage of white orchids, step from her car.

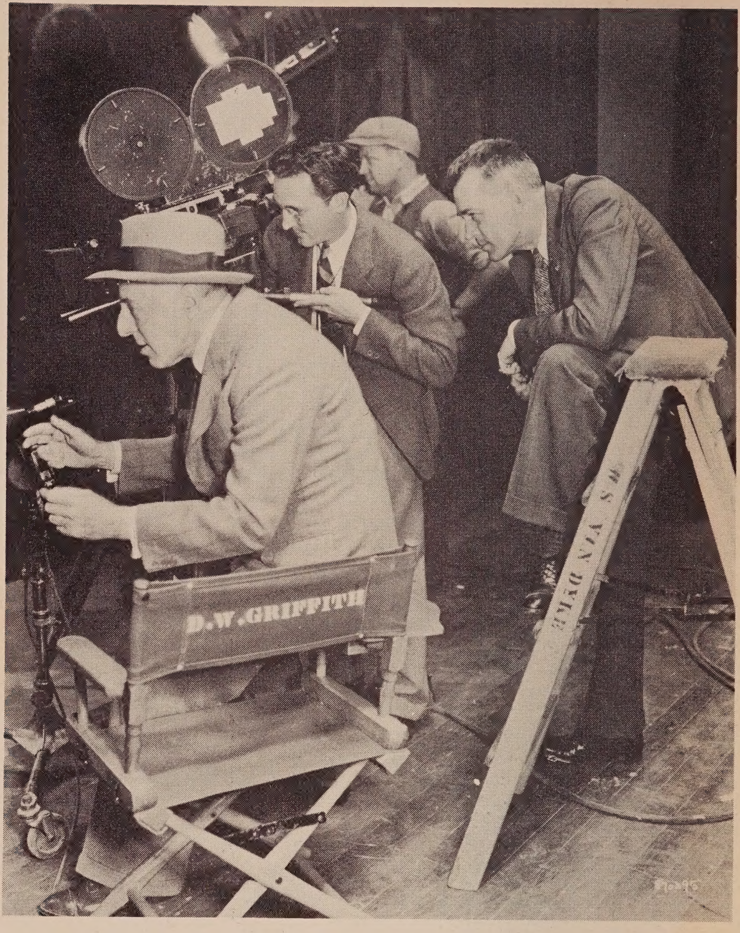
* * *

Howard Estabrook, top-flight screen scenarist and secretary of the Screen Writers' Guild, said of Van Dyke after seeing the premiere, "From 'Trader Horn' to 'Marie Antoinette'! What a span! What a man!"



James Stewart in one of his first important roles, with Jeanette MacDonald and Nelson Eddy in "Rose Marie."

Mrs. Anna MacDonald (Jeanette MacDonald's mother), and Laura Winston Van Dyke attend a premier at the Carthay Circle Theatre in Hollywood.



D. W. Griffith directing one of the spectacular earthquake scenes in "San Francisco." (Van Dyke, learning that Griffith was about to visit his set, had ordered DW's name lettered on a director's chair; and as a gesture of his profound respect for the Griffith ability, turned over to him the direction of the next scene while he stepped into the background.)

The pair who proved again Woody's "one-take" ability:
Norma Shearer and Tyrone Power.

The late Major W. S. Van Dyke, II, USMCR, with his wife Ruth, and their three children, Barbara, Winston, and W. S. Van Dyke III.

Chapter 36

THE MOTION PICTURE BUSINESS AND WAR

CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

The Motion Picture Business and War

In the fall of 1932 while in Alaska filming "Eskimo," Van Dyke had written Washington about the Japanese activities in the Aleutian Islands and in waters of the Bering Sea off the coast of Alaska and Siberia. Upon his return home from the Arctic he was asked to address a large group of officers on the subject of the possibility of a foreign enemy developing air fields in the far North. Major A. B. Miller, U.S. Marine Corps recruiting officer in charge of reserves in the Los Angeles area, attended the dinner and was greatly impressed. He spoke to Van about joining the reserves and on September 26, 1933, Woody made official application for a commission in the Fleet Marine Corps Reserve.

In December, 1933, Miller addressed a letter, through the necessary channels, to the Major General Commandant recommending that Van Dyke be considered for a commission in the Reserve. In the letter of recommendation, Miller said:

" . . . . unusual ability as a leader of men, as an executive and as an administrator. He is one of the leading directors of the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer studios of Culver City, California, and has carried out some of their most hazardous expeditions at far corners of the world.

"His leadership has been demonstrated in his making of 'Trader Horn,' in the interior of Africa. For a period of over a year he had about three hundred men, white and natives, under his command. His executive and administrative ability was demonstrated in the handling of trucks, commissary, transportation, road building and disbursing of nearly two million dollars, and the successful end of his mission without the loss of one life. His tactfulness was amply demonstrated in his successful dealing with French, British and Belgian officials."

"Mr. Van Dyke has just recently returned from Alaska where he completed his latest picture 'Eskimo.' He is also familiar with the South Seas. Upon his return from Alaska I heard him deliver a lecture before a group of officers. This lecture was very enlightening and demonstrated to me that Mr. Van Dyke could be of great service to our country as an officer. Due to his unusual abilities and his age, it is recommended that he be given a commission as Major in the Fleet Marine Corps Reserve."

(Signed)
A. B. Miller

Lieutenant Colonel Walham C. Wise, Jr., USMC, interviewed Van Dyke and on the strength of Wise's findings, Brigadier General J. T. Meyers, commanding the Western Reserves Area, at San Francisco, endorsed Miller's recommendation and forwarded it to the Major General Commandant at Washington, D.C.

Van Dyke received the commission of Captain in the Marine Corps Reserve on February 13, 1934. He was Captain in the Reserve Corps at the time "Naughty Marietta" was previewed in Washington and he took advantage of the opportunity to discuss with high-ranking military men his observations in Alaska.

On September 28, 1935, Van was promoted to the rank of Major. From that time on military personnel were always seen around the Van Dyke sets and at his parties. He had a sincere, profound and deep love for the Marine Corps and took his Reserve responsibilities seriously.

The Hollywood Reporter's Sixth Annual Edition, June 8, 1936, featured an article, "The Motion Picture and the Next War," written by Van Dyke. In it, he said in part . . .

"There is not much I would not do to avert war. And you and you would do the same. We will grant the horror of it, the inanity of it, the absolute uselessness of it. We will shout against it and preach against it and fight against it. But when the talking is all over and everyone is thoroughly satisfied with his or her philosophy about war, THEN if war should come, what are you going to do about it?

" . . . . . Whether you like it or not, gentle souls, war is coming and it is going to have a great and very decided effect upon the motion picture industry. Our job will be manifold in the next great war. Set designers can adapt their talents to camouflage. Film studio artists will create animated line drawings, such as we see in Mickey Mouse and other animated cartoons, for projection on screens in training camps, to teach the rudiments of intricate war problems. Cameramen will record a complete history of the war. Their photography will acquaint the recruit with actual battle conditions under fire, and air shots of terrain will aid in seeking out enemy fortifications.

" . . . . . The motion picture will be used in training raw recruits, teaching them the manual of arms, how to prepare packs, operate wartime equipment and other multiple activities.

" ..... Above all, we will supply a tremendous moral support, and we should be organized to do it!"

Because Van was one of the highest salaried directors in the business, his contract with M-G-M was so airtight he could not break it under any circumstances. As the European situation became more critical, however, he took advantage of a contract renewal time and had his attorney, Mabel Walker Willebrandt, insert a clause in the new contract that would enable him to be immediately separated from the studio in event of war. He was kidded about his predictions and viewpoint, but always took the ribbing without offense. But he never became less serious-minded about it himself and continued to make his own preparations for what he felt was inevitable.

After September, 1939, when Germany marched into Poland, official Washington moved fast. All branches of the military mushroomed overnight. Colonel J. C. Fegan, Director of Marine Corps Reserves at Washington headquarters, was made a Brigadier General. Early in 1940 he was given orders to activate the reserves, and to select two prominent and outstanding Marine Corps Reserve officers — one on the east coast and one on the west coast — who were to lay the groundwork for a broad recruiting program. Van Dyke was chosen for the west coast job. He was given a staff of regular and professional reserves to assist him. Captain Franklin Adreon, Jr., a former regular and a Marine Reservist, was asked to aid Van Dyke. He was assigned the Los Angeles area. They soon had several crews familiar with recruiting and induction procedure and awaited and were ready for the rush when it came.

In July of 1940 Van Dyke received orders to organize and activate to full strength the 22nd Battalion Marine Corps Reserves. He gave the signal for action and Captain Adreon and the crews that they had been training went to work.

Woody made his office on the M-G-M lot an official recruiting station. War had not yet been declared so Van's contract was still in full force and he kept up his responsibilities to both organizations. A regulation Marine Corps ensign hung over his office door along with the stars and stripes. Two sentries were constantly on duty. Van's executive secretary, Florence Thomas, was "Chief of Staff" and found herself keeping records on both the Marines and Woody's picture activities.

Before being inducted, recruits had to pass a physical examination, so Woody got a list of Naval Medical Corps officers and selected Dr. G. A. Stevens for his battalion. He got Stevens on the phone and told him what he wanted. The doctor told him that, as he was already a member of the Naval Reserve Medical Corps, he couldn't serve in a Marine battalion. But Van was such a persistent guy he didn't give up. The next thing Dr. Stevens knew he received an invitation to lunch at M-G-M and Van Dyke put the pressure on again. As a result, Dr. G. A. Stevens was transferred to the Marines. He kept up his large private practice but examined recruits in Van Dyke's offices at the studio in the daytime and also had physical examinations several nights each week in the Federal Building and at the Armory. Neither the doctor nor Van Dyke received any remuneration, but they were two of the busiest men in town.

During these hectic times the Navy and Marine Corps had been trying to get their Armory in Los Angeles completed. The building had been started, but the international situation was not yet critical enough to warrant the release of sufficient funds to complete it. Van threw his influence into the scales and with his contacts in official circles was instrumental in making it possible for William Fox, Los Angeles City Planning Engineer, to complete the building. Fox turned the keys over to Van Dyke and asked him if he would accept the responsibility of the Armory. Van said, "Sure," and they made it headquarters for the battalion. There were no facilities at the Armory for preparing food so Woody made Adreon treasurer of the outfit, gave him a substantial sum of money with orders to have mobile canteens present at all meetings of the battalion so the men could have sandwiches and hot coffee after drill. There were no uniforms or equipment available. Some more hell raising and Van got uniforms and a battery of guns.

Jimmy Roosevelt joined the battalion and was made Van Dyke's adjutant. Eleanor Roosevelt was frequently seen sitting on the steps with the other mothers and wives of the men, watching them drill.

The 22nd Battalion included members of the movie business from various Hollywood studios. Van Dyke's enthusiasm and solid conviction was responsible for many of them joining. And, too, many of Van's old gang who had gone with him on his expeditions joined up because they wanted to go along with him.

The battalion received orders November 1, 1940, to report in December for active duty at San Diego. They were not only up to their full strength, but had filled their allotted ten percent surplus.

On December 15, 1940, the 22nd Battalion, USMC Reserves, marched on the parade grounds at the San Diego Marine Base, led by their own band, Captain Jimmy Roosevelt and Major Van Dyke.

Chapter 37

THE 22nd BATTALION — UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

The 22nd Battalion — United States Marine Corps

Van Dyke had never been happier than when he reported with his battalion for active duty to the Marine Base in San Diego. The international picture was more critical even than Van had thought. Official Washington knew that the United States was headed for war and every means at its command was being pushed to the limit. Since the Marines are the shock troops of the military forces and therefore the first land forces to go into action, trained marine Artillery battalions were needed, and needed fast.

The Marine Corps, like every other branch of the military service, started the greatest expansion program in its history. The general plan was to team up reservists with the regulars so the reserves could quickly acquire the necessary training in military indoctrination and battle maneuvers. The need for artillery battalions was urgent so Van Dyke's 22nd Battalion was absorbed by the Tenth Marines and split up between the first and second battalions. The first battalion was headquartered at Quantico, Virginia, and the second battalion was at San Diego. Lieutenant Colonel John Bushrod Wilson, a regular Marine with many years service to his credit, commanded the second battalion and Van Dyke was made his executive officer.

Van was bitterly disappointed when his battalion was split. They had planned to stick together as a unit and see the thing through, but in war time, Van learned, that doesn't happen, you sleep on your duffel bag and go where you're told to go.

One of the first requirements of an officer in an artillery battalion is a thorough knowledge of trigonometry, as the entire operation is based on trigonometry and there can be no guess work. There is no middle ground.

It was tough on Woody because, as second in command of the outfit, he found himself saddled with a responsibility he was not academically equipped to handle. But he never had let his lack of formal education stop him and whenever he needed to know anything, he acquired the knowledge. The immediate task before him now was to learn trigonometry, so he got some top sergeants and they burned the midnight oil in Van's room preparing him for the school which Colonel Wilson had set up to teach his reserve officers the basic fundamentals of artillery. Most of the members of the class were pink-cheeked. Van Dyke was fifty-three and his temples were silver-white. During school hours many a young corporal or sergeant instructor, respecting Woody's maturity, his position in civilian life, and his rank, was amused and surprised at his candor. He had a little trouble figuring out the relation between the hypotenuse and the adjacent and was apt, when asked a question about something he wasn't clear on, to blat out, "Hell, I don't know." It was rough for him, but he stayed right in there and pitched.

There is a definite proper sequence that should be followed in giving orders when on the range in artillery practice. Van Dyke could never remember the sequence of orders. While waiting his turn, he would be seen on the sidelines, pacing back and forth rehearsing his sequence, but when he got up to the gun he could never get it right. Somehow, though, his crew always hit the target. The regulars could never figure it out — and neither could Van Dyke.

Colonel Wilson said, "He's hell on the instructors in classes with his 'How's' and 'Why's,' but he's also hell on the targets."

Colonel Thomas C. Bourke, commanding officer of the San Diego Marine Base, was greatly impressed with Van Dyke's sincerity and kid-like enthusiasm. He said he never saw a more efficient officer when it came to conducting inspections and the general administration of his outfit.

Brigadier General Joseph C. Fegan, who had selected Van Dyke as the Corps' West Coast Reservist, would shake his head and say, when watching Van work, "That guy's a steam engine in breeches!"

Schooling and indoctrination were over. The battalion moved to Camp Elliott for tactical maneuvers and the real rugged training. Senior officers were privileged to live in town, but Van camped with his men and lived in a tent. The maneuvers were held in the latter part of February and the first of March and there was considerable rain. The maneuver area was wet, clammy and muddy, but Van didn't mind. Even though he was much older than the young men who constituted the battalion, he insisted on doing everything they did, taking no thought of his own physical condition. After three or four weeks of this routine, Van began to realize that there were limits to his physical endurance. His body just could not keep up with his mental energy. While the kids in the battalion were "relaxing" with a game of football after a day of strenuous activity, Van found it necessary to rest in his tent to get his second breath.

One day they were staging a strenuous RSOP — Reconnaissance, Selection and Occupation of Position. Woody refused to ride in a station wagon or jeep and tramped over the hills with his men. That evening, while Van was resting in his tent, Colonel Wilson dropped in and suggested that they make a quick inspection of the gun positions. Colonel Wilson — a regular Marine about forty-five in excellent physical condition — briskly led the way. Van Dyke had difficulty in keeping up with him and when they returned to Van's quarters, he was completely out of breath and hardly able to speak. He said, slowly and seriously, "Colonel, I'm afraid I can't take it."

The battalion moved back to the base at San Diego. One night in April, while Van was Officer of the Day, there was a fire in one of the barracks at a considerable distance from headquarters. When the alarm sounded, he ran to the scene of the fire, but the distance was too great for him and he collapsed. He was taken to the hospital and it was there that he got the greatest shock of his life. The examining physicians told him his heart had gone back on him and that he was no longer qualified for active duty; that they would have to survey him out of the Corps. He was permanently placed on inactive status.

Woody went wild and protested in a voice that could be heard throughout the corridors of the hospital. Inactive status for Van Dyke? The man whom General Fegan had called a "steam engine in breeches?" They'd never get away with it! He was going to be in that scrap with his battalion and nothing was going to stop him. Despite the fact that he had himself realized that the strenuous pace was too much for him, now that it had caught up with him he couldn't give in or concede that he wasn't physically equal to the task his energetic mind had laid out. But war was pending and only physically fit men could be considered for Marine land force installations.

Chapter 38

WOULDN'T ACCEPT "NO"

CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

Wouldn't Accept "No"

On April 29, 1941, Van Dyke gave a farewell party to his outfit in San Diego. It was one of the most difficult things he had ever done. But he hadn't given up in his own mind, and immediately upon his arrival in Los Angeles he telephoned Ross McIntyre, President Roosevelt's private secretary, and got the ball rolling in an effort to be reinstated.

However, before any action could be taken the old 22nd Battalion, now the 2nd Battalion in the 10th Marine Corps, got orders to sail and were shipped out in May of 1941. They traveled under secret orders. Colonel Wilson later learned that their original orders were to take Martinique from the French — a major combat operation. That was why the 22nd Battalion had been absorbed by the 2nd Battalion of the 10th Marines, and that was why they had been so rigorously and quickly trained. However, when they arrived in Panama, the orders were canceled and the battalion was ordered to proceed to Norfolk, Virginia, where they took on supplies and equipment and went on to Iceland to fulfill a commitment made by President Roosevelt to Winston Churchill. England was in no position to spare troops to protect that strategic area.

Van Dyke didn't know where his battalion had been sent, but he knew they had sailed without him and he was heartbroken. When he learned they had landed in Iceland, he sent them a radio and other gifts and kept in close touch with them all the time — all the while holding to his hope that he could be reinstated to active duty and join up with them.

He received a communication from Washington to report to the recruiting station in Los Angeles for another physical examination, and if he passed, to report to San Diego for active duty. Van had remained in uniform and had never unpacked his gear. He was ready to move on a moment's notice. He passed the physical at Los Angeles and lost no time in getting to San Diego to check in. On arrival there he was given another routine examination and passed that one too. However, the examining board in reviewing his medical survey, discovered the condition that had brought his retirement to inactive status and, after due consideration, they regretfully informed Van that they could not pass him because they felt sure the minute he resumed the strenuous activity of the Corps there would be recurrence of his physical collapse. Sick with disappointment, he was sent back to Los Angeles.

By this time he felt not only the disappointment at being out of the scrap himself, but he also began to be eaten by the sense of having failed the men for whose enlistments he had been responsible, and whom he had pledged himself to lead. They were his kids and he wanted to be with them. And, too, he had never forgotten being deprived of the opportunity to get into the fight in the first World War. He then made every possible effort and pulled every possible string to get in. He could not accept "No." Three times he was authorized to report back to San Diego; and three times he was rejected.

All during the time he was involved in his Marine activities, Van Dyke carried on at the studio. One week after the battalion had first reported to San Diego, the studio got hold of him and asked him to take over the Ingrid Bergman-Robert Montgomery picture, "Rage in Heaven," with which they were having difficulty. There was a lull in activities at the base during reorganization of the executive and administrative branches and Van was granted sixteen days leave. He rewrote the whole ending of the story and had the picture finished and on film in his sixteen days leave.

During the interval of his trips between San Diego and Los Angeles, which covered a period of months, Major Van Dyke continued with his activities at the studio and did "The Feminine Touch" with Rosalind Russell, Don Ameche and Kay Francis; "Shadow of the Thin Man" with Myrna Loy and William Powell; doctored up another picture, "Dr. Kildare's Victory;" was called in to try to remake the Jeanette MacDonald-Nelson Eddy picture, "I Married an Angel," and then was assigned to do "Cairo" with Jeanette MacDonald and Robert Young.

At the conclusion of "Cairo," Jeanette's husband, Gene Raymond, who had volunteered in the Army Air Corps, received his commission and was given orders to report to the New York Port of Embarkation. Jeanette wanted to go to New York with him but she knew she would have difficulty getting permission from the front office because she might be needed for retakes. She told the Major her troubles. Woody said, "You stay with Gene as long as you can. Don't tell anybody where you're going, but keep in touch with me by phone. If I need you for retakes, you can hop a plane back and no one will know the difference."

Chapter 39

HOLLYWOOD LOSES A LEGEND

CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

Hollywood Loses A Legend

Woody Van Dyke found himself assisting others in working out their problems and readjustments as a result of the war, but no one seemed to be able to help him work out his own. He bade goodbye daily to pals who were leaving for the service and never would give up his hope that he might somehow be able to go.

As if to cover his great disappointment in not being able to do that which he most desired to do, he became even more expansive in his activities at the studio and never stopped working. His mother and close friends urged him to take a rest because he was beginning to show the effects of overwork, but he would not.

On July 1, 1942, the following dispatch was released from Hollywood: "W. S. Van Dyke has replaced Herbert Kline as director of M-G-M's 'Journey for Margaret' after a week's shooting on the film."

"Journey for Margaret" had been scheduled as a run-of-the-mill picture and hadn't even rated a top director. In fact, the man selected to meg the picture had been in the documentary department and this was to be his first assignment on this type of film. But the bombing raids in England had increased to tremendous proportions and were immediately topical. The studio felt that Van Dyke could capture the emotional import of this story, and therefore called him in to take over the direction.

The cast of "Journey for Margaret" was billed: Robert Young, Laraine Day, Nigel Bruce, Signe Hasso and Fay Bainter. Although the story revolved around an orphan child, Margaret O'Brien, who played the child, was unknown and therefore did not warrant billing. The picture was a story of the London blitz and its effect on the children left homeless as a result of the air raids. Robert Young played the part of William White, war correspondent, who brings to America a little English child orphaned by the bombing raids.

The minute Woody got his teeth into the picture he became a part of the story and seemed to live again. The air raid wardens, sirens, the bombs — the environment of war around him at least provided an opportunity for him to give vent to all of his pent up emotions. *The New York Times* said on December 18, 1942:

> "In *Journey for Margaret* the new film at the Capitol, David Hertz and William Ludwig have adapted, and W. S. Van Dyke II directed a drama to stand alongside the few unballyhooed classics of the screen. By the slightest and simplest means they have created a picture of tortured childhood that will not soon be forgotten by anyone who has ever loved a child. Not in recent experiences has Broadway seen a film so fervent, so tender or so perceptive and true."

Major Woody Van Dyke's heart was in that picture. The tenderness was an expression of his own love for children; the fervency the result of his dilemma in having to play war while his battalion was out doing the fighting.

After "Journey for Margaret" was completed Woody started at once on another story, "Gentle Annie," and after two weeks quit working because the story was bad; the picture was shelved.

Then the body that had so energetically driven this man collapsed. But the fighting heart never stopped. He was forced to confine himself to his home but he refused to go to bed. Being bedridden to him meant giving up. He wouldn't let himself think that he was close to being bedridden. He wouldn't even take his clothes off at night, but slept in his Marine fatigue uniform on the couch in his den.

Despite his confinement at home his time was not wasted. He read scripts by the dozens and kept his executive secretary, Florence Thomas, running back and forth from the studio to his home with new ones.

On February 4, 1943, L. B. Mayer and Van's close friend, Howard Strickling, came to his house. Van, dressed in his Marine casuals, was quite gay and seemed happy. He startled Mr. Mayer when he greeted him with "Hi, L.B." This was the first time that Van had ever called him "L.B." Mr. Mayer told Woody they had several stories in mind and pictures they wanted him to see and when he was ready, to say the word and he could have his choice of any he wanted. Van told him to send the pictures over and he'd look at them at the house. Howard Strickling said, "Okay, we'll have a screen set up here tomorrow." When they left Van called Les Selander, former assistant of Buck Jones' days, and told him to round up some of the gang and come right over that night. Selander had just been given a new script to read and asked if it would be OK to come the next night. Woody said "No, you'd better make it tonight." They came and among them was Eddie Hearn, the assistant who had been with Van in Alaska. They talked over old times and Van bade them all good-night. Woody checked with Florence Thomas on the telephone about the picture he was to see the next day and she assured him that everything had all been arranged, and she would be over in the morning with the screen. His three children — Barbara, Woody III, and Winston — were with their mother at the ranch. Van called his wife, Ruth, to inquire how the kids were. Then he called his mother and talked with her for some time, assuring her that everything was all right. He went to his wardrobe where his Marine uniforms hung — spotless and neatly pressed. They represented the last tangible promise that his greatest dream was not altogether beyond realization. As though he had a presentiment, he took a suit of khakis and exchanged it for the fatigue uniform he was wearing. He retired to the divan in the den for the night.

So he was found the next morning, even as his executive secretary was on her way to his house with the screen. Hollywood had lost one of its most colorful legends.

A fitting conclusion to this story are Woody's own words — the last stanza of a poem he dedicated to The Adventurers' Club:

"..... *So carry on, and when you're dead,*

For epitaph may this be said:

'He had his boots on when he fell,

And made adventure out of Hell.' "

W. S. Van Dyke II.

THE END

APPENDIX

PICTURES DIRECTED BY W. S. VAN DYKE II
at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

TITLE	DATE	STARS
WAR PAINT	1926	Tim McCoy Pauline Starke
WINNERS OF THE WILDERNESS	1926	Joan Crawford Tim McCoy
CALIFORNIA	1927	Dorothy Sebastian Tim McCoy
FOREIGN DEVILS	1927	Tim McCoy Claire Windsor
WYOMING	1927	Tim McCoy Dorothy Sebastian
SPOILERS OF THE WEST	1927	Tim McCoy Marjorie Daw
UNDER THE BLACK EAGLE	1927	Ralph Forbes Marceline Day
WHITE SHADOWS OF THE SOUTH SEAS	1928	Racquel Torres Monte Blue
THE PAGAN	1928	Ramon Navarro Renee Adoree
TRADER HORN	1930	Harry Carey Edwina Booth
NEVER THE TWAIN SHALL MEET	1931	Leslie Howard Conchita Montenegro
GUILTY HANDS	1931	Lionel Barrymore Kay Francis
THE CUBAN LOVE SONG	1931	Lawrence Tibbett Lupe Velez Jimmy Durante
TARZAN, THE APE MAN	1931	Johnny Weismuller Maureen O'Sullivan
NIGHT COURT	1932	Phillips Holmes Walter Huston Anita Page
ESKIMO	1932	Ray Wise Lotus Long Lulu Wong
PENTHOUSE	1933	Warner Baxter Myrna Loy
THE PRIZEFIGHTER AND THE LADY	1933	Myrna Loy Max Baer Jack Dempsey
LAUGHING BOY	1933	Ramon Navarro Lupe Velez

PICTURES DIRECTED BY W. S. VAN DYKE II

at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer

TITLE	DATE	STARS
MANHATTAN MELODRAMA	1934	Clark Gable William Powell Myrna Loy
THE THIN MAN	1934	William Powell Myrna Loy
HIDEOUT	1934	Robert Montgomery Maureen O'Sullivan
FORSAKING ALL OTHERS	1934	Joan Crawford Clark Gable Robert Montgomery
NAUGHTY MARIETTA	1935	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy
I LIVE MY LIFE	1935	Joan Crawford Brian Aherne
ROSE MARIE	1935	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy
SAN FRANCISCO	1936	Jeanette MacDonald Clark Gable
HIS BROTHER'S WIFE	1936	Robert Taylor Barbara Stanwyck
THE DEVIL IS A SISSY	1936	Freddie Bartholomew Jackie Cooper Mickey Rooney
LOVE ON THE RUN	1936	Clark Gable Joan Crawford Franchot Tone
AFTER THE THIN MAN	1936	William Powell Myrna Loy George Zucco
PERSONAL PROPERTY /or/ MAN IN POSSESSION	1937	Jean Harlow Robert Taylor
THEY GAVE HIM A GUN	1937	Spencer Tracy Gladys George Franchot Tone
ROSALIE	1937	Nelson Eddy Eleanor Powell
MARIE ANTOINETTE	1938	Norma Shearer Tyrone Power
SWEETHEARTS	1938	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy
STAND UP AND FIGHT	1938	Robert Taylor Wallace Beery Florence Rice

IT'S A WONDERFUL WORLD	1939	Claudette Colbert James Stewart
ANDY HARDY GETS SPRING FEVER	1939	Mickey Rooney Lewis Stone Fay Holden
ANOTHER THIN MAN	1939	William Powell Myrna Loy
I TAKE THIS WOMAN	1940	Hedy Lamarr Spencer Tracy
I LOVE YOU AGAIN	1940	Myrna Loy William Powell
BITTERSWEET	1940	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy
RAGE IN HEAVEN	1941	Ingrid Bergman Robert Montgomery
THE FEMININE TOUCH	1941	Rosalind Russell Don Ameche Kay Francis
SHADOW OF THE THIN MAN	1941	Myrna Loy William Powell
DOCTOR KILDARE'S VICTORY	1941	Lew Ayres Ann Ayars Lionel Barrymore
I MARRIED AN ANGEL	1941	Jeanette MacDonald Nelson Eddy
CAIRO	1942	Jeanette MacDonald Robert Young
JOURNEY FOR MARGARET	1942	Laraine Day Robert Young Margaret O'Brien

Photo by Peter Gowland

THE AUTHOR

ROBERT C. CANNOM, author of "Van Dyke and the Mythical City, Hollywood," began his show business career while attending high school in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at the Powers Opera House.

Show business became deeply ingrained in his system. During the early '20s, he was a member of the publicity and advertising staff of Butterfield Theatres and later became manager of several stock companies in the Middle West for W. H. Wright. Spencer Tracy and Selena Royal were permanent members of this theatrical group.

In 1926 Cannom went West to join the original organization of Fox West Coast Theatres. During his eleven years with this organization he was instrumental in making Studio Previews an important factor in the successful production of motion pictures. He also directed stage shows and radio broadcasts for Fanchon & Marco and produced and organized civic activities in Los Angeles, including mammoth outdoor pageants in the Coliseum.

In 1938 Cannom became producer and director of the popular Al Pearce radio show. He left the Pearce unit on Christmas Eve 1941 to join the United States Coast Guard. He served four years on active duty in World War II. Upon returning to civilian life he changed the course of his career and started writing this book about his intimate friend, W. S. Van Dyke II. With the continuous encouragement and support of Laura Winston Van Dyke, the famous director's mother, Cannom finished the story.

BLE
GARBO
STEWART
POWER
CRAWFORD
MacDONALD
SHEARER
EDDY
DURANTE
POWELL
LOY